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DANTE

A DRAMATIC POEM BY

HÉLOÏSE DURANT ROSE

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D A N T E

A DRAMATIC POEM BY

HÉLOISE (DURANT) ROSE

*Member of the Dante Society
Cambridge, Massachusetts*



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TO HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW

'As smallest urchin in the village school,
To say some trying task, finds he must rise,
Haunted by hope of a far distant prize,
Fearing to fail, and so remain the fool,
Knowing how rarely he has felt the rule,
How oft the Master's smile, with looks defies
The pupils' taunts, and seeks his teacher's eye
To gain new confidence should courage cool,
So I, the least on learning's noble list
In life's rough school face bravely gaze of
crowds,
Nor mark when carping critics rudely twist
My sense to naught, but stand erect and proud,
If from thine eyes and lips encouragement
'And smile I glean. Master! I rest content.

IN MEMORIAM

When faint my soul with task yet incomplete,
Who nursed kind hope save thee, and urged to
dare

When I dared not? In thine now vacant chair
Thou satst, mild critic, dropping counsel sweet
On her who loved and listened at thy feet.
To-day I tread rhyme's way alone, nor care
For praise nor blame, since thou'l no longer
share

With me my poem's triumph or defeat.
O, let thy guidance still my safeguard prove!
As giant oak, wind-stricken to the ground,
To all the thronging tuneful choir around
Yields royal shelter, so of thy generous love
That blossoms freshly o'er thy hallowed grave
One tiny spray to nest my song I crave.

CHARACTERS

DANTE ALIGHIERI, *the great Italian poet*
GUIDO CAVALCANTI, *the poet, a friend of Dante*
CORSO DONATI, *a Florentine politician*
GEMMA DONATI, *his sister (later Dante's wife)*
FALCO PORTINARI, *founder of first Florentine Hospital*
BEATRICE PORTINARI, *his daughter*
BEATRICE ALIGHIERI, *Dante's daughter*
JACOPO ALIGHIERI, *Dante's Son*
PIETRO ALIGHIERI, *Dante's Son*
GIOTTO BONDONE, *the painter, Dante's friend*
CAN GRANDE FRANCESCO DELLA SCALA, *Duke of Verona (Dante's friend)*
GUIDO NOVELLO DI POLENTA, *of Ravenna*
GIOVANNA D'ANTIOCHIA, *Can Grande's wife*
MARCO NERLI, *friend of Dante*
GIOVANNA (Primavera)—(becomes Cavalcanti's wife)
VINCENZO DAL COLLE, *a Florentine politician*
FRANCESCA DAL COLLE, *his daughter*
UBERTO DAL COLLE, *his son (friend of Dante)*
DINO BRUNINI, *a Florentine bon-vivant*

GITA, *a servant*
BEPPO, *a servant of Dal Colle*
JESTER
DELEGATE, *at Court of Can Grande*
CARDINAL
PRIEST
MONKS

Also Pilgrims, Nobles, Travellers, Dancing Girls, Pages, Ass Driver, Boys, Peasants, etc.

PROEM TO DANTE

Thou mighty poet-king, with brows thrice
crowned
By genius, sorrow, love, who dared express
Thy scathing thoughts aloud when bitterness
Possessed thy soul; whom Florence once dis-
owned,
Denied to sing or live; who now sits throned
In every heart through Italy, no less
Revered than loved; who spied each dark recess
And uncouth horror of abyss profound!
O, look not thou reprovingly on me
For straining feeble wings toward eagle height,
Wresting thy utterance, depicting thee
With my poor pencil. Infants turn to light,
And so my weakness seeks thy strength to
touch.
Dante! though frail my art, my love is much.

- ACT I. *Garden of Falco Portinari's Villa
near Florence.*
- ACT II. *Falco Portinari's house in Florence.*
- ACT III. *In front of San Giovanni's Church
in Florence.*
- ACT IV. *Scene I. The Campo Santo near
Florence.*
Scene II. Ducal Palace at Verona.
*Scene III. Palace of Guido No-
vello di Polenta at Ravenna.*

GEMMA. [Morosely.]

And why so sure that *she'll* bestow the prize?

FRANCESCA.

There's none so worthy to be chosen Queen.

GIOVANNA.

Dante! Dante! Durante Allighieri!

A MAIDEN.

Why callest thou our poet? He's not near.

GIOVANNA.

I called but as one conjures spirits, who
Attend the coming of an angel. Dante
Is magic word to conjure Beatrice.

FRANCESCA.

Let us invoke him, then—our poet Dante.

[GEMMA, who is sitting on the same bench
with FRANCESCA, makes a sullen move-
ment widening the space between them.]

[Enter BEATRICE PORTINARI, walking
along the balustrade at back of the stage,
looking out in the direction of Florence.
She is followed by her page. She leans
over the balustrade of the terrace.]

BEATRICE.

Florence, the sun caresses thee as Jove
Caressed fair Danaë in a golden shower.

Thy beauty glows, till eyes grow dazed with light.

Like Queen thou art, so stately in thy strength,

With silver Arno for thy scepter. Guard Thy rights, O royal city! Guard thy people! Still keep us gay with joyous feasts of love, With dance and song, with gentle revellings, And let war's thunder roll beyond thy hills, Forgotten in the nearer notes of peace.

FRANCESCA. [Calling.]

Beatrice! Bice!

OTHERS. [Calling.]

Beatrice!

BEATRICE. [Turning.]

Pray, spare my ears. Would I were deaf to-day!

FRANCESCA.

So soon returned to earth? I saw thee caught

In realm of fancy,—flown to such a height
Methought one pair of lungs weak messengers

To call thee back.

[BEATRICE sits on the stone bench, between FRANCESCA and GEMMA. GEMMA rises spitefully.]

BEATRICE.

Thou seest I'm close to earth—
Ready to celebrate Calendi Maggio.

GEMMA.

And, being thy father's daughter, courtesy
Accords thee pretty favors all this day;
As hostess, we must greatly honor thee.

GIOVANNA.

There is no *must* in our allegiance, Gemma,
And only blind folk fail to see she's fair,
Or deaf folk fail to hear how sweet her voice.

FRANCESCA.

A jealous heart oft makes one deaf and
blind.

[Enter MARCO NERLI.]

MARCO.

I greet the graces in their native bowers.

FRANCESCA.

Say seasons. Thou, Marco, be our Winter,
Thou, Vanna, Spring, and Beatrice Summer;
The changing Autumn I—that suits me best.*

MARCO. [Seating himself by FRANCESCA.]

Winter comes next to Autumn.

*Giovanna was nicknamed *Primavera* (Spring). See *Vita Nuova*.

FRANCESCA.

Turning e'er
Her coldest side to him.

GIOVANNA. [Plucking flowers, and turning to
BEATRICE.]

I'll weave a wreath to crown thee Queen of
Love,
Since Dante deems thee Queen of human
hearts.

FRANCESCA. [Gathering flowers.]

And lion-tamer shouldst thou, too, be called,
For thou hast sway o'er Dante's soul.
Among the learned is he not a lion?

BEATRICE.

He's slave worth keeping for his faithfulness.

GIOVANNA.

And links by Bice forged are lightly worn.

BEATRICE'S PAGE.

Ah, that our Dante tarry not! I fain
Would hear him sing of love and ladies fair.

A MAIDEN.

Thou art a foward page to prate of love.

A YOUTH.

And tread upon the heels of older men.

BEATRICE. [To the youth.]

Much older, in faith—with not a hair on chin.

[All laugh.]

PAGE.

Dante jeers not. He ever sighs, or sings
Of youthful love—and pages do have hearts.

BEATRICE.

Nice little ones, like their young mouths, to fill
With sugar toys. Our Dante sings for men
And is a soldier as well as poet.

VANNA.

Wasting his life in shadowy dreams of bliss,
Our poet's braver fighting men than women.

[GIOVANNA, BEATRICE and WOMEN con-
verse apart.]

FRANCESCA.

He learnt this truth: Bodice and skirt with
youth

'Are fatal foes to fortitude of men
'And yet to fly a woman is disgrace.

MARCO.

In which I'll not partake; so still sit here,
Braving the smiles I dread more heartily
Than others' frowns; for wicked is thy wit
Piercing through closest coat of mail, like
love.

FRANCESCA.

O, love, love, love! How smoothly does it
oil

The creaking wheels of this old lumbering world;

Yet, oft like Fame, 'tis wasted on the heads
It seeks to crown. A youth may burn his heart

On altar raised unto some seeming goddess,
Who, when well warmed, throws water on
his flame,

And lightly scatters to the restless winds
The ashes of his faith; or gentle maid
Despoils her soul's sweet treasury, and finds
Her purity and peace stamped out beneath
The iron heel of some base libertine;
And men who could have left high-honored
names

As heirlooms to a future race, have spent
Their talents, time and strength on some wild
son

Who grew to flout and hate his gray-haired
sire.

So love may prove a dancing will-o'-the-wisp
To those who seek its light in earth's vast
marsh.

MARCO.

Gladly I'll seek and track the elf, and win
Fair bride thereby.

FRANCESCA.

Wilt have a wife? I know
A maid cut just thy pattern.

MARCO.

Aye, and a painted piece of wax—a puppet—

FRANCESCA.

Who talks and reasons well.

MARCO.

What—both? From such
Defend me, gentle Heaven! Wives with
their tongues
Are bad; but wives with brain, who chatter
too—

FRANCESCA.

This maid would rather read than be a gossip.

MARCO.

Far worse. A modest wench would waste no
thoughts
O'er love scenes.

FRANCESCA.

Nay, more oft she'd con her missals
Than Romaunt.

MARCO.

Sure, such saintliness would swoon
If I did swear.

FRANCESCA.

Not so,—a maid of spirit.

MARCO.

A shrew, I'll warrant thee. I'll none of her.
Canst tell thy fancied fair to break her heart
And rave that I her life have basely wrecked.

FRANCESCA.

Wrecked, Marco? Nay, thou knowest not
our hearts.

What if we venture all our happiness
Within the frail bark Love, and storms arise,
And toss the skiff on barren shore—what
then?

Though love be stranded, 'tis not lost. We'd
glean

The wreck-strewn beach, shaping a raft from
out

The fragments of our parted bark; anon
We'd launch forth bravely on the world's
rough sea

Our pilot virtues, born of stormy grief,
Guiding us safely to our destined goal.

A woman must be master of her love
Or it will master her. But, Marco, hark!

This maid will hate thee not, though like
white wax

Near fire, thine image melts before her pride.

MARCO.

'And was this maid drawn by thy fantasy?

FRANCESCA.

I saw her thus reflected once.

MARCO.

Where? How?

FRANCESCA.

Where—How? Indeed, in thy two eyes, my friend.

[FRANCESCA *runs off.*]

MARCO. [Starting to follow.]

Cesca!

GIOVANNA. [Turning to him.]

Nay, stay. I'll bring Francesca back. [Exit.]

MARCO. [To himself.]

Meant Cesca then herself? And yet her words—

She is a madcap—witch as well as sybil!

BEATRICE. [Hearing him.]

She's loving friend, with honest, purest soul,
Whose wit, though keen, scarce wounds.

Her joyous heart

Basking in God's clear light e'er sunshine
sheds

On those who lie forgotten in the shade.

MARCO.

Thy golden nature glints in praising hers.

PAGE.

There comes Dal Colle with black-browed
Corso;
But, alas, no Dante.

MARCO.

They'll watch for him,
And every sprig * he gathers must be paid
Anon with posies of bad politics.

BEATRICE.

Why do our elders spoil our pleasures?
Youth

Calls out for joy—not business—in fair May.

[*She turns away toward terrace.*]

[Enter YOUTHS and MAIDENS, with music.

As the music stops, there are exclama-
tions, and DANTE, GUIDO and FRAN-
CESCA enter.]

Hail to Dante!

Hail to his twin poet Cavalcanti!

DANTE.

Fair ladies all, I greet you thousandfold.

[Crosses to BEATRICE.]

Madonna, let us wander in the grove

* Sprig of cytisus laburnum.

Where the fair meaning of this blessed month
Sinks in the soul, that all my garnered
thoughts

In one melodious whole may chant thy praise,
When we to-day, in friendly rivalry,
Each vaunt in song our gracious lady's
charms.

BEATRICE.

To-day thou must pay homage to fair Spring.

DANTE.

Thou art my Spring; I'll tune my lyre to thee.
A smile from thee sends swift blood from
my heart,

To bloom as tender fancies in my brain.
Thy Court of Love holds revel all the year;
The chastity of Winter's silent snows,
The lusty red of Autumn's russet cheek,
Bare-bosomed Summer's wantonness, alike
With gentle Spring's soft green, invite all
men

To rhyme thy worth in one eternal strain.

GEMMA. [Standing near.]

I'd weary of these forced comparisons—
As sun, moon, stars, by turn to shine—con-
ceits
By singer's fancy framed.

DANTE.

Keep thy scorn, Gemma,
Till age steals from thy looks a poet's theme.

BEATRICE.

And art thou sure that all thy metaphors
Do give me joy, Ser Dante?

DANTE.

O Beatrice!

GEMMA.

The irate lion feels his keeper's touch
On tawny mane, though light as thistledown!

DANTE.

A thoughtless woman's wit sees idle mirth
In sacred things, and tries its wreath of roses
On sodden skulls.

BEATRICE.

Now, out of gloomy moods
We fain would laugh thee, Dante. Faith,
thy brain
Must feed on graveyard damps or midnight
mists
From salty marsh, so stern the mind that
moulds
Thy features to a lengthy face.

FRANCESCA.

Say short;

'Tis like Eve's apple—ruddy, red and round.

[*All laugh.*]

MARCO.

Thy apple savors more of fabled Paris
Than Eden; more of discord than of knowl-
edge.

BEATRICE.

Ne'er heed these foolish jests; we honor thee
As poet to the highest Court of Love,
As singer in May's festival.

DANTE. [*To BEATRICE.*]

Madonna,

Thy father lured me to this verdant shade
With promise of thy presence, and I'm here
In thy bright glance to bask, as snowdrops
warm

To life from Winter's chill in smile of Spring.

FRANCESCA.

Wilt tune no lyre for other maids; I vow
Guido will strike a note for Donna Vanna;
Now can I not persuade thee to laud me,
To rhyme of dark as well as golden tress,
And halo my plain self with poet's craft?

MARCO.

Let prose prove honest substitute for rhyme
'And say thou art the fairest maid to me.

BEATRICE.

Come, friends, let's gather golden blooms
together

To greet the goodly company from Florence.
And will not Dante wend his steps with ours?

DANTE.

Thy lightest wish is high command to me.

FRANCESCA.

Haste, Messer Dante. Her wit's no laggard
In crossing swords with thine.

BEATRICE.

Mine now is sheathed.

[*She holds out her hand to DANTE. He bends and kisses it, then walks by her side.*]

GUIDO.

Smile, Beatrice, smile his frowns away,
We need the songs that Dante sings when
gay:

For sing ho! sing hey! 'Tis joyous May,
And maidens are sighing, and lovers are cry-
ing:

'I love for a year as well as a day.'

[*Exeunt all but GEMMA.*]

[*Enter GEMMA's brother, CORSO DONATI.*]

CORSO. [*Seeing GEMMA alone.*]

Why solitary, Gemma? Have the youths
Forgotten what is due to a Donati?

GEMMA.

Good Corso, nay; but yet Donati may
Forget what's due the youths. They weary
me.

CORSO.

What—none can suit thy fancy, sister?
Speak:

Hath not a poet sung thy heart away?

GEMMA.

If so, his own is in another's keeping,
And all his thoughts are centered on the stars.

CORSO.

Visions, fair sister—visions. Youthful poets
Oft dower maids with fancied charms, for
dummies

On which those verdant rhymesters string
their verse.

The star this rhymester lifts his voice unto
May fall!

GEMMA.

Not if the fates ordain she shine.

CORSO.

Strong men o'ertop the fates with sheer per-
sistence.

GEMMA.

Ambitious words do not beget great deeds.

CORSO.

Mine father them. I will not hide my meaning.

Dante may sing of Beatrice's charms,
Yet weds her not—but thee, a proud Donati!

GEMMA.

Ah, Corso; to fulfill such prophecy—

CORSO.

Be led by me. I know a way to tie
This poet's roving fancy to a wife.

He'll dance a tame-bear husband at thy
hearth!

GEMMA.

Hast thou witch-potion or a wizard's phial?

CORSO.

Go, laugh with youths and maidens, and if
pain

Possess thee, mask it with a smile. Disdain
To bare thy heart-aches, till the time is ripe
To conquer Dante in one stirring scene;
And let thy passion like a whirlwind then,
Drive him into thine arms. Be patient,
Gemma!

[*He kisses her. She slowly follows the
others and goes out.*]

[Enter FALCO PORTINARI, DAL COLLE
and followers.]

FALCO.

Most welcome, Corso, as our guest to-day;
What trouble in the air o'erclouds thy brow?

CORSO.

To-morrow's ills. The cause obsesses me.
'Tis time to rouse us. Every man we need;
But arms and horses spring not from the
ground,

And gold can buy what wit may not com-
mand:

So gold we need more than the people's will.

DAL COLLE.

My daughter's hand is sought this day by
one

Whose gold we can annex.

CORSO.

Urge on the match.

Time counts with us. We are beset with
foes

That crop up round us like rain-nourished
weeds.

Hew down a score and hundreds fill their
place.

Among our so-styled friends are traitors too;

That charlatan of singers—Cavalcanti,
And Dante—

DAL COLLE.

Prithee, spare our poet.

CORSO.

Bianchi more than Guelph is he. But wait,
I have a plan to bind him to our interests.

DAL COLLE.

We'll treat this subject further on the morrow.

FALCO.

Ay; for to-day we play the lavish patrons
In pageant of our city's Feast of Love,
And must not therefore grudge youth's jollities.

[*They talk apart on the terrace.*]

[*Re-enter FRANCESCA and GIOVANNA.*]

GIOVANNA.

I will not linger near thee now to mark
The treacherous blushes telling of thy love.

FRANCESCA.

Hush, hush, I have no love.

GIOVANNA.

No love in Cesca!

I'll wager thee a new sweet song of Dante's
That thou wilt soon be Marco's bride. Take
counsel

Of merry birds who mated months ago.
List to their singing, Cesca. Hear them say:
'We'll have no spinster in our midst this
May.'

[*Exit.*]

FRANCESCA.

Yet 'Nay' is quickly said, and 'Yea' methinks
More quickly still. Fond fool to fancy
maids
'Are won so lightly. What power hath love
that I
Should be so glad to yield my virgin pride
Unto a stranger's keeping? Yet I'd box
His saucy ears if he but whisper this.
'And still I love him. Come, my Marco,
come!

DAL COLLE. [*Joining Francesca.*]

So, wench, thou hast been dreaming of love-
knots,
'And turtle doves.

FRANCESCA.

I, father? Nay, my dreams,
My thoughts, dwell rather on the lance than
needle.

DAL COLLE.

Tut, girl; I know thy whims. Have not
thine ears

Drunk in too many passioned words of late?

FRANCESCA.

Ay, when thy broth's too hot, or cake's too
cold.

DAL COLLE. [*Taking her hand.*]

Shut thy pert lips, thou foward minx!

FRANCESCA.

A kiss
Will close them fast.

DAL COLLE.

Thou shouldst be saving such
For gracious wooer.

FRANCESCA.

When he comes, I will.

DAL COLLE.

He came and went.

FRANCESCA.

Without a chance for me
To courtesy low and say: 'I thank thee, nay?'

DAL COLLE.

Why nay, if he did please thee?

FRANCESCA.

He would not.

DAL COLLE.

How canst thou tell unless thou sawst the man?

FRANCESCA.

I'd have a nay for full a score of men;
This one would be too fat, and that too lean,
And this too short, and that too tall, too old,
Too young, too grave, too gay. I'd pick a fault

In Cupid's self, if he came wooing me.

DAL COLLE.

So wilt thou dwell as virgin e'en to eld,
'And wither on a single stalk, instead
Of knowing fruited boughs of matronhood.

FRANCESCA.

Show me perfection, and I'll mate with it.

DAL COLLE.

As Marco fails to pose as perfect man,
When he sought thee this morn, I scorned his suit.

FRANCESCA.

Marco was seeking me?

DAL COLLE.

Vowed he would prove
A son to me; swore his undying love
For thee.

FRANCESCA.

And went he then without a yea?

DAL COLLE.

Didst thou not say a nay would be thy answer?

FRANCESCA.

Never to him, the bravest, kindest man.

His love would crown with joy a woman's life.

O, that he stood but here, I'd to him straight
And throw mine arms about his neck as now
I twine them round thine own, and whisper
low:

'Marco, I love thee; take me to thy heart!'

DAL COLLE.

Then try it, child; for knowing woman's mind

Changes as quickly as an April day,

I bade this valiant wooer turn his steps

This way, and get his answer from thy lips.

FRANCESCA.

The reddening West make me a fool if here
He finds me.

DAL COLLE.

Whither goest, Francesca?

FRANCESCA.

To ponder o'er the fitness of this wooing.

[FRANCESCA runs off but meets MARCO
entering. He stops her. DAL COLLE

watches them; then, smiling, goes out.]

MARCO.

Cesca, am I ne'er welcome?

FRANCESCA.

Truly not,
Unless thou bringst good news.

MARCO.

I bring myself.

FRANCESCA.

That thou art news, I never knew before;
That thou art good, I ne'er shall ascertain.

MARCO.

But not for lack of opportunity.

FRANCESCA. [Courtesying.]

Great thanks! The chance is not much to
my taste.

MARCO.

But 'tis to mine, and for the future we
May share possessions.

FRANCESCA.

But then your *may*,
Can wait upon my *shall*, till both are worn
To one leg betwixt them with the standing.
'And still my *shall* remains unchanged—your
may

Had better go to the wall, Ser Marco!

MARCO.

Thy father thinks not so.

FRANCESCA.

I'm not my father,
The saints be praised! Wouldst have me
think his thoughts?
Then must I grow his beard, thin, gray my
locks,
And wrinkle up my brows and harden palms,
Donning a garb like thine for women's folds.
Speak, Marco, would I please thee better
thus?

MARCO.

Nay, thou art best as maid, with all thy faults.

FRANCESCA.

Then I have faults? And dost thou croon
them o'er
With ardent zeal, as crooning dame her
beads?

MARCO.

Come, Cesca; in a war of words, I'm naught;
Lay thy small hand in mine, and say thou
'Marco,

I love thee,' and the wide, wide world hence-
forth

Could crumble all to dust ere I prove false.

[*He tries to take her hand.*]

FRANCESCA.

Wouldst wed a puppet—painted piece of
wax—

A maiden who might talk a man to death,
Or waste her time o'er love scenes, or a shrew,
Or silly saint, who'd cross if thou but swore—
A good-for-naught, who was to break her
heart

For love of thee?

MARCO.

What means this speech?

FRANCESCA.

Good sir,

Thy memory's dull; these words should call
to mind

Fair flowers, bright eyes, stone bench, and
Beatrice

When offering thee a wife.

MARCO.

Ah, pretty witch,

I see thy wicked meaning, and for this crime
Shall claim sweet recompense—a kiss, my
Cesca.

[Takes her hand.]

FRANCESCA.

Nay, tarry yet. Women are vanes, men say;

What wind will blow me round to face thy
love?

MARCO.

My heart, sweet maid.

FRANCESCA.

But it may prove false prophet.

MARCO.

And wherefore hath thy father tricked me
here?

To jest at honest love? No answer?

[Going.]

FRANCESCA.

Stay!

My father likes thy suit—speaks well of
thee—

But I—

MARCO.

Would fain be rid of it. Nay, Cesca,
I'd force no maid to wed against her will.

FRANCESCA.

Nay, nay; not quite against my will—

MARCO.

But not

With all thy maiden heart. I know thee true
And would not gain thy hand without thy
love.

Farewell!

FRANCESCA.

But stay! A little love—

MARCO.

A little!

Nay—all thou hast to give, or none! Out
with it!

Speak thou yea or nay.

FRANCESCA.

A dwarf—a pigmy 'yea.'

MARCO.

A stout, strong 'yea'— A Hercules!

And say thou lovest me—or scorn thy 'yea.'

FRANCESCA.

Ah, Marco—fie—fie! Wouldst force me
say it?

MARCO.

Alas! Then we must part— Farewell!

FRANCESCA.

But wait!

Give me the time to say these fateful words
That bind me thine. Marco—yea—I love
thee!

[*They embrace, and go out.*]

[*With sounds of merriment, enter GEMMA,
VANNA, GUIDO, a page, youths and
maidens.*]

GIOVANNA.

[*Pointing to FRANCESCA, who is leaving with MARCO.*]

Hey, for the joys of May; there's a sweet pair

Cooing and billing like two turtle doves.

Guido can make a little song for them.

GUIDO.

Dante might make another. He lingers
With Beatrice in the grove.

PAGE.

[*Watching from the terrace.*]

Now Dal Colle

And Corso swoop on him. He will be caught

In swirling politics. Strike out, good swimmer,

Clear eddies and then land thyself with us.

[*Re-enter DANTE. He is immediately surrounded by youths and maidens.*]

DANTE.

[*Gazing at the group.*]

On life's gnarled tree, O Youth, thou art the blossom,

With all the pretty secrets of the Spring;
Rose petals tint thy cheeks; the scent of May
Perfumes thy breath; the cadences of birds

Re-echo in thy voice. Thy being diffuses
A fragrant freshness. Go and blend thy
sweets
With other dainty buds and blooms around:
Anon I'll rhyme my homage to my lady.

[*Amid the protests of the maidens and swains DANTE turns to DAL COLLE, CORSO and PORTINARI. GUIDO joins DANTE as the youths and maidens withdraw.*]

DAL COLLE.

These pleasant pastimes are an interlude
To civic duties for our city's good.
We Guelphs need watch and ward our party's
strength,
Lest Ghibellines intrude upon our rights.

[DANTE is impatient.]

CORSO. [*In an unpleasant mood.*]

Lest Bianchi undermine our strength; Vieri
Dei Cerchi is the man we most should dread.

DANTE.

Here prejudice, not reason, speaks, Donati.
As seething river, turbulent with flood,
O'erflowing banks and ruining greening
crops,
Arose from tiny rill in some far cranny
Of lonely hillside—so this bitter feud

Spread out in warring factions, did arise
From trivial source. Two women's angry
looks

First lit this coal of enmity betwixt

* Ye twain. When Vieri at the feast, in jest,
Begged that some friendly soul should sit be-
tween

Thy lady and her neighbor at the board—

CORSO. [*Interrupting.*]

He planned an insult, seizing her arm.

DANTE.

Nay,

'Twas kindly meant, but when thy lady rained
Hot words on him, his fiery temper blazed;
Out leaped thy sword to answer his rash
speech,

And in that clash of steel this feud was born.
Instead of Guelphs uniting 'gainst their foes,
We stand divided in our aim, alas!

As Neri and Bianchi!

CORSO.

Ay, and will

While merchants still uphold such men as
Vieri;

* See Appendix.

Self-satisfied, patting their well-filled pouches,
To lord it o'er the ragged populace,
While soldiers' arms and valor go for naught.

DANTE.

Our merchants fill as honorable place
As soldiers. Our guilds give much to enrich
Our lives. Through them the Florentines
join hands
With many lands, e'en to the Orient.

CORSO.

Are we the better for gay bales of silk,
Attar of roses and gem-crested cups?

DAL COLLE. [To CAVALCANTI.]

What says our poet philosopher to this?

GUIDO.

My voice need not be heard when Dante's
here,
Far less when speaks the Baron—Flower of
Chivalry!

The new St. Chrysostom, Second St. George!

CORSO. [Savagely.]

My chivalry at least absolves me, Ser,
From posing as a poet, rhyming florins
Out of the people's pockets.

GUIDO. [Drawing sword.]

Messer Corso!

DANTE. [Holding GUIDO.]

O, Peace! How quarrel on a day like this!
The very skies in their unbroken blue
Rebuke thy anger. 'Tis sin to trespass
On holidays with witless feuds, my Guido;
These golden hours call for gentleness.
Come, let us join Madonna Beatrice.

[With DANTE'S hand on CAVALCANTI'S shoulder, the two poets walk into the garden and exeunt.]

CORSO. [To DAL COLLE, looking in the direction DANTE took.]

'Tis Guido's piping charms the Allighieri
To consort with that Cerchi tribe. Once
Guido

Is driven from the field, Dante is ours.

DAL COLLE.

Corso, do nothing rash to-day. The people
Are in jovial mood.

CORSO.

A quarrel might be picked
Perchance next month at San Giovanni's feast.
With streets packed full of lusty fellows, we
Shall find our purpose ripe.

DAL COLLE.

Ay, bustling crowds
Have their advantages for spitting men,

But here 'tis vain, for Dante favors Guido,
And Beatrice favors Dante. Corso,
We cannot lure this falcon from his mate.

CORSO.

A shadowy maiden is not mate for Dante!
Dante, as well as Florence, must be ours,
'Tis well to bind him subtly to our cause
By ties of blood. Gemma is fair. Dal
Colle,
Kind Fate must match this pair to suit our
ends.

DAL COLLE.

Hush—here Dante nears with Beatrice.

[*Re-enter DANTE and BEATRICE. BEATRICE has a branch of cytisus laburnum.*]]

[*Enter with music, revellers garbed in white and yellow. They also carry branches of laburnum.*]]

[*Enter GUIDO CAVALCANTI, GEMMA DONATI, GIOVANNA, DINO BRUNINI, FALCO PORTINARI, MARCO NERLI and FRANCESCA.*]]

ALL.

Honor to our host and hail to Dante!

FALCO.

Kind thanks, fair dames and maidens, gentle youths;

And reverend signors, as my honored guests,
I bid ye all glad welcome to the feast.

MARCO.

Hail to the poets!

ALL.

Hail to our Dante! Hail to Don Falco!

[DANTE and FALCO bow acknowledgment.
The Votaries dance and pipe and
form a circle, BEATRICE, GEMMA, GIO-
VANNA and FRANCESCA in the center.]

REVELLERS CHANT.

See fairest maids in Florence; one must wear
The crown of beauty on her silken hair;
All four our true allegiance share.

Now name the Queen who dare!

SEVERAL.

Beatrice!

Francesca!

Beatrice!

Gemma!

Beatrice!

Giovanna!

Vanna!

Beatrice!

Beatrice!

ALL.

Beatrice!

'A YOUTH.

The crown is won by Donna Beatrice.

[*All cheer. A wreath is placed on Beatrice's head, and she is escorted to a throne, FRANCESCA and GIOVANNA on one side, BEATRICE's page and GEMMA on the other.*]

FALCO.

Now let the Cavalliera add renown
To this day's sports. Let each recount his
deeds

Of valor done for his fair lady's sake.

[*Dante steps forward.*]

DANTE.

Three moons agone, the Donna Bice, in sport
Flung down her glove, and bade me bring it
back

Filled with the pearls the robber Ugo stole.
Here, for my lady, are both glove and pearls,
Redeemed from robbers' roost, where dead
he lies.

[*DANTE drops the glove and pearls in BEATRICE's lap. She kisses them with delight. All cheer.*]

CORSO.

And I, at gentle Vanna's light behest,

Stole through our foeman's camp, risking my
life

In her sweet service. And hence I claim re-
ward.

Give me thy colors as thy loyal knight.

[Kneels to GIOVANNA.]

GIOVANNA.

'Twas but a jest. I need thy service not.

CORSO. [Rising furiously.]

Dost mock me, jade?

GUIDO. [Drawing his sword.]

At men, Ser Corso, aim thy insolence,

So that they properly may answer it.

CORSO. [Draws his sword and lunges at
GUIDO.]

Ah, blows the wind, Ser Poet, in that quarter?

[FALCO rises and intervenes.]

DANTE.

Nay, nay! Defer your petty feuds. To-day
We worship peace. Our valiant soldiers
need

Their swords for foes. And if they must be
drawn

On this fair day, their use is gentleness.

Cut off gay branches to adorn your homes
With the sweet semblance of a golden rain;
And let the fire in your swords flare out

In passionate words of love to celebrate,
'As honest Florentines, Calendi Maggio.

FALCO.

Come, let us have our poets sing their lays.

DAL COLLE.

Methinks their trade of tinkering idle rhyme
Begotten of spring fancies, fits not men
We need for civic duties of the hour.

DANTE. [*Springing up.*]

The fancies born of spring breed noblest
deeds,

No power so strong to mould men's wills as
love.

The people need the lesson of the spring.

God's glance may glint in burnished helm
and shield,

But in God's mother's month His smile lies
hid

In each enfolded flower and budding bough.

His voice is heard in each vibrating note

Of birds a-quiver with May's melody;

And every hour's duty should be love—

Love of fair women, love of home and God.

[*Cries of 'Dante is right! Hail to our
poet, Dante.'*]

CORSO.

Still I approve Dal Colle's words. This
tinkering
Of rhymes—

GUIDO. [Interrupting.]

Now out upon thee for a fool.

Here is my sword defending Poesie—

DANTE. [Restraining him.]

She needs no champion, Guido, for the world
Needs her to champion it. She sings to men
In joy and sorrow, teaching how to woo
'And how to voice the bravest battle hymn.
Her lightest whisper's heard in hell and
heaven.

FALCO.

Then let us hear her gracious voice to-day.

The sun declines—the contest must begin.

[*The pipers pipe a strain. Order is re-*
stored and a young poet rises.]

POET.

Here at her feet I sigh,
Here would I gladly lie
To dream of her and die.
Her beauty is 'divine;
An angel in a shrine,
Too lovely to be mine.

[*They applaud him.*]

DINO BRUNINI.

I crave your gracious patience for a song.

A MAIDEN.

Is't a crow's song?

'ANOTHER MAIDEN.

Will the porpoise dance, too?

[All laugh.]

DINO. [In a squeaky voice.]

The lily white, the lily white,

Is every maiden's fair delight;

But when roast pigeons greet the sight,

I'd rather have the wine that's white.

CHORUS.

He'd rather have the wine that's white.

DINO.

The roses red, the roses red,

Bloom for the living from the dead;

But when the table's richly spread,

I'd rather have the wine that's red.

CHORUS. [Laughing.]

He'd rather have the wine that's red.

GUIDO.

Shame, man, to sing of food and wine, when

Beauty

Sits here and smiles before thy dullard gaze.

SEVERAL.

Sing! Guido, sing!

GUIDO. [Approaching GIOVANNA.]

Spring comes! Beneath her white feet rise
The flowers debonair.
Her sweet breath scents the air.
Within her eyes no guile
Is hid. Upon the breeze
Her long hair floats. Her smile
Invokes the birds, till these
Fill all the wood with song.
Her voice sets hearts afire,
For Spring is herald to sweet Love's desire.
My lady comes! Her lightest step awakes
An echo in my breast,
Arousing deep unrest,
Until I touch her hand,
Until her lips greet mine.
Her servant to command,
Here at her feet, divine,
I kneel and bow. Her spring
Blooms tho' the leaves are sere,
Her radiancy illumines all the year.

[*There are cries of 'Hail! Guido! Hail
to Cavalcanti!'*]

FALCO.

Bravely has Guido rhymed his lady's charms;
The fair Giovanna—Primavera!
Now, Dante Allighieri, strike thy lyre!

CORSO. [Aside to DAL COLLE.]

Hearst that, Dal Colle, how they laud him?
DAL COLLE.

Wait, Corso, wait till San Giovanni's Day.

[*The sun is setting behind the trees.*

DANTE rises and approaches BEATRICE.]

DANTE.

When suddenly, amid the thoughtless crowd,
There falls a hush upon the place,
And glory shines on every face,
Reflected as from Angels' wings
Passing the earth at birth or death;
Or, from the censers, as they swing,
Full of rich incense, and men's breath
Comes faster, as they look and kneel—
'Tis when a miracle they spy,
'And my most beauteous lady passes by.

It were as if a fragrant rose from Heaven
Had fallen to earth. Her glorious mien
'Astounds all men; her gaze serene
'Abashes sin. Sheen of the sea
Is in her eyes; the sun's red gold
Glints in her hair; and purity
Like shining robe 'doth her enfold.
Ah, sensuous beauty may delight,
But Beatrice's blest in God's own sight!

ALL.

To Dante the prize! Allighieri wins!
Hail, Dante! Hail, Durante Allighieri!

[*The sun has set and the afterglow illuminates the scene.*]

[BEATRICE takes off her wreath and places it on DANTE's head.]

FALCO.

And now, good friends, we'll haste unto the feast.

I bid ye all thrice welcome as my guests.
Each drink and dance beneath night's silver lamps

And let each lover toast his lady first.

[*Music. All depart except BEATRICE and DANTE. GEMMA lingers, dropping her scarf; then also leaves. BEATRICE rises and starts to go.*]

DANTE. [*Turning to Beatrice.*]

O lady, stay,
And blend thy beauty with the flowers' breath.

BEATRICE.

I dare not tarry now.

DANTE.

May's song and perfume,

Its leaf and bloom, with new life tremulous,
All breathe a blended note of tender love,
Inviting confidence. I pray thee, wait
To hear the message my soul hath for thine.

[*She sits again slowly near DANTE.*
Pause.]

BEATRICE.

I listen, but our poet's tones are mute.

DANTE.

*When in thy presence, honored one, I stand,
* My spirits faint till naught but sight is left,
* While e'en my daring orbs grow dazed and
 dim
* Beneath thy beauty. Speech deserteth me;
* My troubled heart, wild beating, stifles
 breath.

My mind, too moved to think, for tyrant
 love,

Whose liegeman true am I, claims every sense.
O, thou who art my sight, and pulse and
 thought,

Be courteous with thy power, most gentle
 Bice,

'And sport not with the sorrows of my soul,
Unless it pleases thee to see me wan
 With wretchedness.

**Vita Nuova.*

BEATRICE.

Not so; with joyousness
I would thy life were filled.

DANTE.

Each day men ask
'For whom hath love so wasted thee, O
Dante?'
And I could say 'For one who mockingly
Commands me to be gay, while her cold heart
Slays me outright with her own loveliness.'

BEATRICE.

Forgive youth's wantonness.

DANTE.

Forgive me, Sweet,
That to such soul as thine I could impute
A fault; no flaw could keenest eye spy out
In thy pure heart; when women see thee pass
* They cry, 'What miracle on earth is here?'
* And men find evil thoughts killed by thy
gaze.

BEATRICE.

If I believed thy words, to purge my pride
'Twould Paternosters and more Aves need
Than one poor tongue could tell throughout
the year.

**Vita Nuova.*

DANTE.

To know one's worth can scarce be counted
crime.

BEATRICE.

Yet to delight in self, is deadliest sin,
And pride thus fostered, proves inimical
To true Philanthropy; O, shun it, Dante!

DANTE.

'As trusting babe clings close to mother's
breast,

With instinct truly seeking safest haven,
So turns my heart to thy rare influence,
Knowing thy virtue guards mine own. So
speak,

Most gentle lady. Would that I might listen
To such sweet harmony till deafening death
Dulls ears of clay—then find in Paradise
Angels still syllabbling thy tender tones.

BEATRICE.

Trust not to human sympathy for strength
To fight 'gainst sin. Trust only aid divine;
Nor lean on some poor mortal prop like me,
Who from thy sight may any day be taken.

DANTE.

Madonna, if thou fail me—life is death.
Should I be lingering, hearing one say
'come,'—

Hug mouldy garb of earth 'stead donning
robe

Bright with celestial woven tints?

DANTE.

If He

Who lent such graciousness to us were pleased
To call thee to Himself again, dare we
Still stay thy steps, tho' in the jealous grave
Slept all our joys with thy fair mortal frame?
But should thy presence fail me while in life
Thou dost yet bless all human hearts and
eyes,

Then farewell, peace! Unrest lords o'er my
soul!

BEATRICE.

Withhold thy passionate love from me, and
seek

To house it in a heart that turns to thee.

DANTE.

Where could I nest my love, since in thy
breast

It shelter sought years past? Could aught
dislodge

Such holy guest from such a holy rest?

Nay, give thy heart's sweet dower to whom
thou wilt;

So thou art joyous, need I weep my loss?

But let me keep my loyal love still pure
And live but in the pleasure of that love.

BEATRICE.

Alas, poor Dante!

DANTE.

Rich, indeed, in love,
Though beggared in all else. Let no salt
drops
Deface thy roses. See, no more I sigh,
But smile, for in my soul thou still art mine,
And wilt be so for aye and aye and aye.

BEATRICE.

Dante! By all thy poet's fire, I plead
For thine own sake, to rouse thee from this
dream.

DANTE.

Yea, dream, if life be sleep; but thro' closed
lids
Love speeds at will. Turn not those emerald
eyes

So sadly from me; I am merry, Bice.

BEATRICE.

O Dante! Such strange joy springs from
sad heart.

I cannot leave thee sad. Thou art a part
Of all that's beautiful in life to me.
On every lip I hear thy praises sung;

Since child I ever honored thee as one
Whose forehead touched the stars, while at
thy feet
We sat and listened to the songs thou stol'st
From stranger spheres. But when thou
speak'st of love
Thy passion flames—a great consuming fire,
Too splendid for a glow-worm such as I.

DANTE.

O, let thy tender heart still plead for me.

BEATRICE.

What wilt thou that I say?

DANTE.

One word of hope,
And love, to star the night of my despair.

BEATRICE.

I falter on the threshold of my speech;
But couldst thou wait—

DANTE.

Till when, my Beatrice?

BEATRICE.

Give me a month or more, in which I'll strive
To reach the pedestal whereon thy love
With poet's fancy raises me.

DANTE.

A month

Or more! And must I wait five endless weeks! [Pause.]

Parting and silence may be deemèd best,
But vain behest, Madonna Beatrice,
Though dumb my tongue, with worlds divid-
ing us,

All varied space that might between us lie,
Brings thee the nearer me—my soul to thee;
Thy voice is in the breeze, thine image haunts
The green of forest nooks, rose-tinted sky,
Peaks purple, sapphire levels of sunlit sea,
In dewy freshness of dawn's radiancy,
In sunset's flaming pennant, flung across
The west with twilight's rare necromancy,
For thou art all in earth and heaven to me.

[He kneels.]

BEATRICE.

An Empress 'neath her purple would feel
proud

To hear thy words. At San Giovanni's
feast,

I'll pray the gracious saint to bless our love.
Then, after mass that day, come to our house,
So we can crave my noble father's blessing.

[BEATRICE holds out both hands to
DANTE, who still kneeling, takes them
reverently in his own.]

[Enter in background, GEMMA and CORSO.
She picks up her scarf. Then, in dumb
show, points toward DANTE and BEA-
TRICE. CORSO, also in dumb show, paci-
fies her and tells her to wait.]

DANTE. [To BEATRICE.]

O blessed San Giovanni's Day! thrice
blessed!

O love, my love! My blessed Beatrice!
Thou art my prize on San Giovanni's Day!

[DANTE kneels to BEATRICE.]

CURTAIN

ACT II

A room in Falco Portinari's house in Florence. Enter from street: Vincenzo Dal Colle, Dino Brunini, Gemma Donati and Attendant.

DAL COLLE.

San Giovanni's day! Now may its purposes
Work for our ends, with Corso's brains as
guide.

DINO.

And Dino's legs, and eyes and tongue, to
serve

Those brains. Yea, yea, 'tis San Giovanni's
Day,

And may it bring good luck and gold to me
For trotting off my flesh to find when Dante
Or Guido shift their steps—

DAL COLLE.

All for the cause.

DINO.

The cause! The cause is dear to me as
Greek.

Thou art my cause while loose thy purse
strings dangle

With promise of an adequate reward.

DAL COLLE.

Have patience, for thou knowest my word is good.

Falco has sent his household to the mass;
A dull hind guards the door, and of the
wenches,
Gita alone is left.

DINO.

Pretty Gita!

Thy name suggests a pleasing picture. Smooth
Thy kerchief; shake thy ebon locks; flash eyes,
For Dino's here to shower smiles upon thee!

[DAL COLLE and GEMMA come forward,
leaving ATTENDANT in the background.]

DAL COLLE.

Art sure thou knowest well what part to
play?

GEMMA.

My brother has instructed me. 'Tis hard
That maid should need to scheme for love's
reward.

DAL COLLE.

Thy task is easy, and the goal is great;
Thou'l gain a husband, we a strong ally.
First plead fatigue and linger here, awaiting

Beatrice. We know that Dante comes
To visit here at noon. Tell him thy tale,
'As if impelled by his love poesy
To speak of love. But veil the object of
Thy fond desire. Thy brother's men will
stir

A broil to hinder Bice coming home.
Dante, impatient, will hie him to the church.
Thou'l^t follow him and show to all the crowd
Thy fond solicitude.

DINO.

Gemma, beware
Of blows not meant for thee, but ill directed.

GEMMA.

Fear flies before such ardent love as mine.
I threw aside my maidenly reserve
When Corso bade me act to aid the cause.

DAL COLLE.

Then loudly feign a wild, tempestuous grief
When Corso plays his part as outraged
brother,
'And, cursing, drives thee from his shelt'ring
roof.

Then Dante's chivalry must ope his door
To rescue thy fair name, imperilled for him.

GEMMA.

Hush, methinks I hear our host approaching.

DINO.

A swish of skirts proclaims 'tis pretty Gita.

[Enter old GITA.]

DAL COLLE.

Here is a beauty to thy liking, Dino!

DINO. [Annoyed, to GITA.]

Where's thy master, witch? Speak, lazybones!

GITA.

How should I know? I have my work to do,
To spin the flax and chide the kitchen wenches
When they in gossip fail to turn the spit.

DINO.

Old Knownaught, stir thy stumps.

GITA. [Audibly to herself.]

Witch, Lazybones, Knownaught. He's mad
and fool.

DINO.

Thou dried-up mummy of thy youthful self,
Tell Falco I am here. Haste, scourpot,
haste!

GITA.

Tell him? Not I, fast flinger of foul filth!
May all the ills of life befall thee straight!
May murrain prey upon thy flocks and herds;
Crops fail, temptations of Saint Antony
'Assail thy soul, and thou succumb to each!
May death—

[Enter FALCO.]

FALCO.

Cease bawling, Gita; get thee hence.

[Exit GITA.]

FALCO.

Welcome, good friends, on San Giovanni's Day.

DINO.

Good morrow, neighbor. We come to find thee

Guarded like Hell, with worse than Cerberus;
A surly soul, thy Gita.

FALCO.

But honest, Dino;
And sourest temper often makes sweet cooks,
Who bake meats well, and wrinkled hands
can spice
And roll smooth paste.

DINO.

All indigestion's ills
Would wait upon my meals such hags did
serve.

FALCO.

Tarry till noon, Ser Dino. Then thou'l have
My daughter's pretty maids to wait on thee.

DAL COLLE.

'Tis rumored through the town she weds di
Bardi.

FALCO.

Simon di Bardi is my choice for her,
A worthy mate for daughter of our house.

DAL COLLE.

And is fair Beatrice strong again?

FALCO.

The leech restored her from the fever's grasp,
But she is weak. What news hast thou, Dal
Colle?

DAL COLLE.

I came for some, Ser Falco. A certain Beppo,
An unhung rascal, who hath called himself
My servant erst, is missing since a brawl
Two other knaves out of my service knocked.
I'm told he's hurt and cared for in thy house.

FALCO.

True, true. He is a lusty fellow. Soon
I'll send him back to thee.

DAL COLLE.

My thanks are thine.
How many more poor knaves hast thou be-
friended?

FALCO.

I keep not count of guests God sends to me.

DINO.

But of the lame and halt there'll be no limit.

FALCO.

'Tis true. My house is taxed to shelter all
The luckless wights misfortune overtakes.
One lodges in the cellar, one in garret,
And one on bed of straw in kitchen lies.

DAL COLLE.

This open-handed largess leads thee far.

FALCO.

Beyond these walls I'll build a house
For homeless sick, where all can go,
And service claim of leech and pothecary.

DINO.

On such a folly wouldst be wasting gold?

FALCO.

Not wasting, Dino; all we spend on others
Is stored in Heaven for us with ten-fold in-
terest.

And Dante will be aiding me in this.

[Enter MARCO and FRANCESCA.]

MARCO.

Greetings, good Portinari!

FRANCESCA.

May blessings
Of San Giovanni's feast day rest on thee.

FALCO.

A welcome ever waits ye here, my friends.
A special welcome for the bride and groom.

[GEMMA greets FRANCESCA.]

DINO. [Addressing his niece FRANCESCA and her HUSBAND.]

Good Morrow, Cesca Eve and Marco Adam.
Still vaunting of your new-found Paradise?
Let ye once taste of the forbidden fruit
Satiety, and each will quick spy out
The other's nakedness of soul. Sew leaves
Of manners and of forms to hide Love's bar-
renness,

'Twill still peep out through most elaborate
stitching.

'As yet the lover lingers in the looks
Of new-made husband, and the honeymoon
Clings to thy steps.

FRANCESCA.

More pity if it's reached
His heels already. On his lips this morn
Methought that I could taste it still a scrap.

MARCO.

In our hearts, wife, when waneth one fair
moon,
Shall rise another sweeter than the first,
Providing honey lavishly to feed

Throughout our years of eld that wild bee,
Love.

DINO.

String out your comfits on a silver thread.
Sugar and moonshine! Food for fool or
fay.

But wait till rage domestic storms, and where
Are sweets and beams? Melted, dispersed
and gone!

Love is at best but restless, flitting guest;
Clip close his wings to hold him all thine own.
Love's no more love from god to changeling
turned;

But let him near thee poised on outstretched
wing

And wildly beats thy heart to win him thine.
Let humdrum souls prate on in drowsy tones
Of joys of household loves; to me the kiss
Stolen at midnight from reluctant lips
Of some coy maid is worth full thousand fold
The known embraces of a wedded wife.

FRANCESCA.

Thou raven-uncle! 'Auguries ill-omed
Fall faint on ears stopped with love's sweetest
song.

But let me turn Cassandra and foretell
Thy nearing punishment for flouting love;

Before thy time thou shalt grow old. Sharp
words
Bring wrinkles; crooked thoughts work
crooked lines
On smoothest skin, and pinched soul makes
pinched face.
See, uncle, youth slips by thee unawares;
Sure as I live, there are three hairs turned
gray.

DINO.

Gallimatta! Niece, thy wits wool-gathering
See all things white. Call Dante here, and
tell him

He's lily-fair; 'twill suit his jocund mood.

FRANCESCA.

O, uncle! thou art not a man but mass
Of vanity and selfishness, skinned o'er
With maxims for preserving beauty's tints.

[*She turns to talk with FALCO.*]

DINO. [*Aside.*].

To heed an angry woman's words is like
Stopping to count the stinging grains of dust
The east wind bears. Crowfeet! said she;
gray hairs?

The wench is mad!. They're ten years off
at least!

The devil's in the witch to drawl of age.

[Enter GIOVANNA and LADIES.]

SEVERAL.

Greetings, dear Ser Falco! Where is Bice?

FALCO.

She wended way to mass before the fête.

GIOVANNA.

She must not linger in the crowded church.
We'll bring her back to celebrate the day
At home. Good San Giovanni will forgive
That we burn fewer tapers in his honor,
While we can deck his image here with blos-
soms.

DINO.

O, would fair maids, this were my saint's day,
too,
So dainty hands could crown my head with
roses.

FRANCESCA.

A devil's day would suit thee better, uncle.

DAL COLLE.

Hast heard what this gray-bearded spend-
thrift plans?

A house for homeless sick and wounded
churls?

'Twill surely foster brawls to hear of it.

GIOVANNA.

O, may I send my churlish kitten there?

She's lost a whisker in a fight and limps,
With one sore paw held piteously aloft.

FRANCESCA.

And our house-dog, a veteran in frays,
Needs two new ears, and half a foot of tail!

GEMMA.

And my poor moulting thrush is needing
feathers.

[*The ladies laugh.*]

MARCO. [Turning to FRANCESCA.]

Ne'er jest at noble impulses, Madonna.

FRANCESCA.

We stand rebuked, and kneel for pardon.

FALCO.

Rise,
Fair sinner. Thy sweet penance overleaps
Thy fault.

MARCO.

'Tis bravely planned to heal the sick.
Within the walls by generous Falco built
Ills blessings turn, and duties glide to acts
Of joy, while faith can whisper of bright
shore

Beyond the bitter water of death's tide.
A house of shelter for the stricken poor
And house of healing where the weary rest

Is God's own inn for God's own chosen
guests.

DINO.

And as Dante sings 'let each trivial act
Be our wax candle.'

MARCO.

Nay, that's wrong; 'tis thus:

'O, let each trivial act shine on each life
Aglow with good—an altar light for soul.'
If thou twist Dante's words, thou'l feel his
hand;

* Passing a smithy but a se'nnight since,
Dante heard amid the roar and blowing
Some snatches of his songs sung quite amiss,
And straight in street he flung the smithy's
tools;

So did he beat a dullard driving asses,
Who chanted idle rhymes, and dubbed them
his.

'Wouldst bastard thy vile thoughts by father-
ing them
On me?' cried Dante, seizing swift the stock
The varlet held, and laid the blows on him.

FALCO.

Ay, Dante preaches tortures should be tried

* Sachetti.

On those whose lawless touch, soils poesy's robe.

Ape's hairy paw can with rude grasp deface
A Giotto's masterpiece; an idiot can
With sinewy strength swing high in crazy mirth

A ponderous hammer round a Psyche's head,
And shatter with one blow a faultless gem
Of Grecian sculptured art, and cry: 'Ha!
Ha!

These things are only made. I can unmake!
A cur can snap in twain a lute's sweet strings
And mute forever make its dulcet tones.
Ape, idiot, cur unite in men, says Dante,
Who with coarse hands spoil pictured images
Of poet's mind, break up his moulded thought,

Or change to discord music of his brain,
And, smiling, mar that which they could not make.

DAL COLLE.

Trust not the poets, who, surpassing sophists
In sophistry, are full of reasons as
The scented honeycomb with cells; with smile
Sweet as the poisoned liquid, gold within
Yet from the wood elves' nectar differing wide,

For he who'd rashly sip these traitors' sweets,
Finds subtle poison creeping through his
veins,

His manhood shrivelling up beneath the touch
Of feigning friendship's cloak—like Hercules,
Fire-wrapped in white robe stained with Nes-
sus' blood.

MARCO.

We need trust friends, though some are
proven safe
To trust with plans as cat with cream; yet
men

Will venture hands in hornet's nests till stung.
But Corso's none. He proves his enmity
E'en when he smiles. He hath more strings
to bow

Than there are tendrils on a sturdy vine.
He watches Guido, like snake beneath the
grass
May wait to strike, though still unfelt his
sting.

DAL COLLE.

Thou'l feel it yet. He knows thou'rt not his
friend.

FRANCESCA.

O, leave the eternal fret of politics.
[Holding up book to DAL COLLE.]

See this fair gift—a new illumined missal
Fra Benedetto wrought for me. Each page
Is rich in gold and crimson, and pale blue,
With scrolls and flowers full of heads of
saints.

I fear my thoughts will wander from the
mass,

When feasting eyes on it in church. Even
The cover's decked with lilies of our town.

MARCO.

Alas, our Guelphic lily's red with blood—
Ill omen for the Florentines to-day.

DINO. [At window looking into the street.]

Here is a fellow making mouths at me.

[From the street outside a clownish fellow
has approached, and endeavors to ex-
press himself in pantomime.]

FRANCESCA.

Ho! ho! There's nothing strange in that,
good uncle!

DINO. [Watching through the window.]

He waves his hand, and motions toward the
door.

GIOVANNA. [Approaching the window, look-
ing out and laughing.]

And lovingly he strokes the bars. In faith
He must be Gita's lover.

FRANCESCA.

Glad Gita!

[*They laugh.*]

GEMMA.

What a scare-crow. He sniffs food in th'air.

For now he peers into the kitchen window.

FRANCESCA.

Hush! Let's watch. He's moving nearer.

Come, Vanna.

[*They all run off to street through rear.*]

DINO. [*Turning, and finding them gone.*]

Vanished! Upon my soul, 'tis witchcraft.

The room was full of petticoats—and now
Not a shred of one remains.

FALCO. [*Who has been talking with DAL COLLE and MARCO.*]

Good Dino,

Is some stranger needing help?

DINO.

Methinks

'Tis but a witless fool seeking some dinner.

[*Re-enter ladies, with laughter, pushing in
a clown.*]

FRANCESCA.

Good host, solve us this riddle, if thou canst.

FALCO.

Speak, fellow, what brings thee here?

CLOWN.

A lady.

DINO.

No lady would own thy legs, and 'twas they
That brought thee hither.

MARCO.

Speak him fair. Good fellow,
What lady?

CLOWN. [*Scratching his head.*]
I know not.

GEMMA.

Was she fair, or
Was she dark?

GIOVANNA.

Tall or short? Canst not describe
her?

[CLOWN *shakes his head.*]

FRANCESCA.

Were her words lagging, or did she speak
with wit?

CLOWN.

She'd wit. She sent me here.

[*Laughter.*]

FALCO.

Upon what errand?

CLOWN.

'Twas thee she wanted.

FALCO.

Yet canst not tell how she was featured?

CLOWN.

She had a nose.

FRANCESCA.

By San Giovanni, thou hast much observed.

CLOWN.

She said to me, 'Now haste thee, lad, to
Falco,'

[*All listen.*]

CLOWN.

And told me where the house stood, and—
I'm here.

FALCO.

What wanted she with me?

CLOWN. [*Slowly.*]

She said 'Make haste.'

GEMMA.

Some dame hath lost her heart to thee, Ser
Falco.

CLOWN.

The lady said he must return with me.

FRANCESCA.

Grey beards find favor in fair lady's eyes.

Haste, *young Falco*, O, haste to keep this
tryst!

MARCO.

A madcap's prank, perchance.

FALCO.

Or purblind beldame

Craving help.

CLOWN.

Ay, help's the word.

MARCO.

Come, speak out!

Tell all thou knowest, poor fool.

[CLOWN *stares stupidly.*]

FALCO.

Was't to help

Someone that's ill?

CLOWN. [Brightening.]

Ay, 'tis that—to help her.

FRANCESCA.

Who?

CLOWN.

The other lady.

GIOVANNA.

Which other lady?

CLOWN.

She said 'haste.'

MARCO. [Gently.]

Now, which said 'haste'?

CLOWN.

The well one.

FALCO.

Some ailing soul hath sent the lad for me.

[Calling.]

Gita! My staff! And give this fellow food.

I must fare forth with him to find his sender.

FRANCESCA.

And in thy train we'll follow to pry out
What lady needs thy help.

GIOVANNA.

And then meet Bice
The fairest bride in Florence; di Bardi
Must treasure her.

FRANCESCA.

He doth; he worships her.

Alas! poor Dante—he fares ill these days.

GIOVANNA. [To FALCO.]

A son-in-law of whom thou mayst be proud.

FALCO.

Thanks, Vanna; I know di Bardi's value.

FRANCESCA.

A greater son-in-law thou couldst have had.

FALCO.

This one suffices.

[GITA brings FALCO's cloak, etc.]

But come, we'll now away.

FRANCESCA.

Ay; we'll all go with thee.

DINO.

And who with me?

FRANCESCA.

Thou dost not merit goodly company,
Scoffing at love, and laughing saints to scorn;
So, while we flock to church, go get a witch,
And with her ride a broomstick to the moon!

GEMMA.

The sun, alack, shone hotly as we came;
I fear to venture out at noon, Ser Falco.
I'd rather tarry here for Beatrice.

FALCO.

Ay, Gemma, rest; my maids will wait on thee.

DAL COLLE. [*Aside to GEMMA.*]

Be cautious, Gemma. Use each golden moment

When thou hast Allighieri here alone.

[*Enter PAGES and GITA, bringing staff and cloak and food for CLOWN.*]

FALCO.

The soldiers throng the streets, and crowds
are stirring;

Let Lapo bolt and guard the door, admitting
None but our trusted friends till I return.

[*Many soldiers are seen among the throng outside.*]

[*Exit GITA.*]

[*FRANCESCA locks arms with MARCO and they start to go into the street.*]

FRANCESCA.

Hail to the merry mummers, piping poets,
And all the gay garbed Florentines to-day!

GIOVANNA.

And hail to Falco's dame of mystery!

[*They step out into the street.*]

[*GITA crosses to the window, opens the casement and looks out.*]

GITA.

There's Dino throwing kisses at a maid.

Ay, wine and wenches are the only Aves
And Paternosters in his devil's creed!

[*DINO walks off.*]

[*GITA closes the window; takes up a distaff, and begins to spin, sitting back in the hall talking to GEMMA. The holiday crowd passes the entrance in the street. DAL COLLE returns looking about till CORSO appears. He taps him on the shoulder and they step aside near the doorway of FALCO's house.*]

DAL COLLE.

Here 'mid the throng of idle pleasure-seekers,
Unwatched we'll coin our speeches undis-
turbed,
Weighing our words, so if there be false
weight

Among them, we can sift it out till naught
But metal unalloyed is left to cast
Into our general treasury of thought.
Vieri, as thou truly saidst, wins way
Through ducats his commercial skill hath
gained.

CORSO.

And, as a flagon of poor flavored wine
Is highly named its tastelessness to hide,
So Cerchi's poverty of head and heart
He seeks to cover with fine soldier names;
But still the mud he's born in sticks to him.
And let him call it battle-stain—what then?
We all know mud from blood unless we squint
With both our eyes, because one varlet cries:
'This through thy scornful heart shouldst
thou look straight.'

[*Touching his dirk.*]

DAL COLLE.

Yet Dante values Cerchi—calls him just.

CORSO.

Ay, Dante, who, forgetting noble birth,
Renounces rights he's heir to, enters name
On register with leech and pothecary,
So he may claim the privilege of guild,
Mixing with herd he builds his hopes upon.
'Tis no strange sight to see him fondle there
One of that herd, who higher holds his head
Than we, by dint of treading on the toes
Of meeker men. Ay, Dante values him,
And yet another sayer of small nothings—
The Cavalcanti weakling, aping strength.

DAL COLLE.

His poems do not lack in prettiness.

CORSO.

Nor lack they baseness. I will take my oath
Such scurvy poet's rhymes, like beggar's garb,
'Are picturesque for being out at elbow.
Dal Colle; these Bianchi—one and all
Must writhe beneath our heels like trodden
snakes.

DAL COLLE.

But Dante still is ours.

CORSO.

Pray for how long?
His growing power in Florence but begets
The love of more; he lays aside his rank

To gain the people's will—and then? Why,
then

He'll rule the despot o'er a cringing crowd.

DAL COLLE.

And yet thou'l help him to domestic ties.

He'll marry Gemma—not our party, Corso.

CORSO.

I give him thus one chance in game of life.
The barren peace that Gemma forces on me
May bear no fruit but dead sea apples.

Our schemes to win him to our cause may
fail.

The flag of peace, once flapped before my
eyes,

Is torn to shreds. Dante still pipes to fools.
I wish our swords might pin to earth to-day
Guido and Marco treading in his wake.

DAL COLLE.

If Marco'd join our cause, his gold were ours,
But he doth linger on the threshold still,
Baffling our aims by his vile stubbornness,
Though I have given him my child for wife.

CORSO.

He openly hath taken sides with Dante,

A third of Florence echoes to his call.

Let us complete to-day what oft hath failed.

Dante and Guido must be foiled: Marco
Must join the common cause—be ours, or die.
DAL COLLE.

Shall I forget he's Cesca's husband, Corso?
CORSO.

A curse upon his kinship if it block
Our way to better things; so let him bleed.
Better his death than our sore defeat.

[*A crowd of young men enter and roughly jostle the holiday crowd.*]

[*CORSO signs to DAL COLLE to come with him. They depart.*]

[*Enter DANTE and GUIDO with retainers. Crowd greets them. They pause as a scuffle occurs.*]

STREET CRIES.

Now Neri! To the wall with the Bianchi!
Nay! Bianchi! Bianchi! Down with the
Neri!

GUIDO.

Hark to the sounds that celebrate to-day!

DANTE.

Such brawlers' din is e'er the matin hymn
And evensong of Florence in these times.
As downy chicks, surprised by sudden sound,
Seek shelter swift beneath their mother's
plumes,

So do my scattered thoughts, fearing great ills
Befall my town, gather beneath the wings
Of my great love, to brood in silence there.
These turmoils weigh upon my soul, dear
friend,
These feuds must end or else our City's
doomed.

GUIDO.

It's Corso's damned Neri!

DANTE.

And Guido's Bianchi.

GUIDO.

Would'st spare the assassin and see Corso
Sheathe in my breast his knife? I deemed till
now

That our just Dante valued life of friends.

DANTE.

That I do love thee is an old, old song
Unto thine ear; that I hate Corso is
No newer one; but justice claims its due
Ere friendship, Guido. For our city's good
We should preach peace, and peace, and ever
peace.

GUIDO.

A poet's dream is never statesman's craft;
Whose party's zeal must color all his acts.

DANTE.

A patriot's zeal should be his country's, too.
Ill blood 'twixt neighbors splits most honest
skulls,

Destroying wantonly, homes, rich and poor,
Till 'stead of cheery mart and street, we gain
Gardingos * to our cost. I would these jars
Were at an end, and private interests merged
Into a self-forgetting, noble love
Of Florence and our Italy, for both
Should claim our love and lives. As God is
one,

'And Nature one and Mankind one, so should
Our Nation be but one in speech and thought.
Then from our Unity would others grow,
Till Europe, merging to a mighty whole,
Could challenge continents o'er all the
earth—

Supreme in her united strength and love.

GUIDO.

Thy words change thoughts of mine to throb-
bing deeds

That long lay hid in crannies of my soul,
Like fern seed in the crevices of ruins,
Starting to life when touched by genial light.

* Gardingos was a place laid waste by both factions.

DANTE.

All dormant good bursts into bloom when
reached
By glory of the Eternal * Who all moves.

GUIDO.

O! ever thou art poet first, then patriot.

DANTE.

No! lover first, and when I near this house
That shelters my beloved liege lady, faint
I grow—my swaying knees scarce bear me up.

[DANTE takes GUIDO's arm, and they
cross to the house as GITA goes to the
casement.]

GITA. [Looking out of the window.]

Here come the poets—our grave Dante and
His faithful Cavalcanti.

[Turns and calls.]

Hi! Lapo!

[Addresses the poets who have reached the
door.]

Patience, good Sers. The knave will open
for you.

[LAPO enters and unbolts the door for
DANTE and GUIDO.]

* Vide *Paradiso*, Canto I.

[Enter DANTE and GUIDO, with their followers.]

GITA. [To the poets as they enter.]

Honored Sers, I crave your pardon for delay.
Ser Falco, but a moment gone, will soon
Return. So will the Donna Beatrice.

DANTE. [To GEMMA.]

Glad San Giovanni's Day to thee, Madonna!

[GEMMA bows in silent acknowledgment.]

[To GITA.]

Good Gita, how fares my sovereign lady?

GITA.

Her step still weak, yet did she go to Mass.
Methought it was a risky thing to do.
Command me, Ser, while waiting for the mas-
ter,
Should you need wine or sup.

GUIDO.

Thanks, Gita—thanks.

DANTE.

Madonna Beatrice's sacred zeal
Has led her 'mid a crowd of rioters
Too boisterous for such gentle graciousness.

GEMMA.

She'll soon return. I felt myself too faint
To mix with such a jostling crowd abroad.

GUIDO.

Thou dost look pale. Did Vanna go with Falco?

GEMMA.

Ay, and Cesca, too. They're bringing Bice home.

DANTE. [*Courteously.*]

Have these warm days already wearied thee?
Corso should send thee to the mountains,
where

The breezes reddens cheeks, like generous
wine.

GUIDO.

Dante's prone to prowling on the crags. His
muse

The sweeter sings, the nearer to the skies.

DANTE.

To stand and see great cities 'neath one's feet,
Vast plains and valleys reaching east and west,
With distant mountains rearing purple peaks,
Makes man feel humble in his littleness,
And puerile the endless strife for wealth,
Of all these battling human ants below.
A long, deep breath of pure, unsullied air,
Sharp with the freshness of the snows revives

The soul, strengthens the heart. A great,
sweet calm

Comes o'er the soul. Madonna Gemma, hie
Unto the mountains.

GEMMA.

'Alas, their calmness
Would not allay my spirit's restlessness.

[GUIDO has opened a book and is reading
by the casement.]

DANTE.

Too young and gracious art thou, fair Ma-
donna,

To meet aught in this life to cause thee pain.

GEMMA.

'Tis pain and joy commingled; such sweet
sorrow

As spurs thy pen to write its sweetest songs.

DANTE. [Surprised.]

If love has prest a thorn into thy heart,
Fear not, for when withdrawn, 'twill burst in
bloom

And crown thee with its roses.

GEMMA.

Nay, nay, alas!

DANTE.

A young and fair Donati will never lack
For ardent wooers.

GEMMA.

Love does not alway answer love's appeal.

We women often love where we're unsought.

DANTE.

My sex must stand disgraced, if thou art left
To sigh for unresponsive love, Madonna.

GEMMA.

Thy gentle sympathy is balm to me.

[*She turns to attendant who has been conversing with GITA.*]

We will await the lady Beatrice in her room.

[*To DANTE and GUIDO.*]

A short farewell, Messer poets.

[*Exeunt GEMMA, attendants and GITA.*]

DANTE.

The maid is pale. May San Giovanni send
Her love to color all her life with joy.
O, San Giovanni, how June's gracious days
Grew bare when they brought sickness to my
love—

The fragrant flowers seemed to lose their
scent,
And blue to fade from out the sapphire sky,
The sun to lose its potency. The world
Became to me a place engulfed in woe.

GUIDO. [*Joining DANTE.*]

Sink not beneath mishaps, as travellers sink

Beneath the blinding snow on Switzer heights,
Lying like clod benumbed, a senseless weight,
Till fatal slumber slips, unmarked, to death.

DANTE.

When Beatrice suffered, life seemed death
To me, who lived but in her light. Alas,
Why was I reft of power to see my lady
When fever shook her tender frame? I'd
fain

Kneel at her feet, kiss tears off silken lash,
As Phoebus kisses dew from grass at dawn;
With love soothe pain, and for her spend my
strength.

Blest was the lowliest wench to wait on her.
I could, alas, but stand aloof and sigh.

GUIDO.

As thou hast ever played a conqueror's part
Through bloodiest frays, so bravely face
love's war.

DANTE.

Prate not to me of love; prate not of war.
I have no heart to face love's cruelties.
A dire presentiment o'ershadows me.
This boasted strength of mine may fail me
sadly.
Some haply find their courage born full-
grown,

Like Pallas from Jove's front, to suit the hour,
While others find their bravery but babe
When chance may give it birth; so found I
mine.

It sorry suckling proved when 'mid the strife
I first drew blade and fought at Campaldino.
Corso then showed he was a soldier born.
Like birds, men stricken fell 'neath archers'
aim;

Rotella and Parvesa shields were pierced
By trusty lance, smooth swords smote skull-
caps through;

While foremost in the ranks rode Feditori!
With cry of 'Cavalieri!' or 'Narbonne!'
When wild came answer back from Aretines
And Ghibellines the cry of 'San Donato!'
Then grew my courage at a breath—a man—
And fast coursed heated blood through swol-
len veins.

We met our foes as wave would break on
wave,

Our blows and bodies mixed in bloody whole.
Fierce raged the fight, dense dust dimmed
light of day,

Till sun was but a red blot in the sky,
And through the murky gloom crawled ser-
pent-like

False Ghibellines to reach us unawares
Beneath Palfreni and Ronzoni, where
They wound themselves and with long knives
 ripped up
Poor brutes, who writhing fell and brought
 to earth
Their gallant riders.

Corso Donati, still
Obedient to his chief, impatiently
Had watched the field—now as spectator
 stood
No longer. ‘Men,’ cried he aloud, ‘are we
To look thus tamely on, so we may pour
In ears of Florentine the dismal tale
Of this day’s dread defeat and comrade’s
 death?
Or must I risk my head to save the day?
Let us but charge, and if we fail we die
With brothers bravely; or, if victory
God grant us, I, for disobedience, then
The penalty will pay, and let who will
Come to Pistoria for my head.’

These words
Scarce said, when he and his two hundred
 knights
Dashed deep into the fight. Guido Novello,

The Ghibelline's brave Bishop's hope, first
stayed,

Then fled. The priestly soldier saw all lost,
And we at last sought death in one mad
charge;

The day was ours! Ah, had we pushed our
steps

On to Arezzo then, our blades still wet,
Would well have forced an entrance to the
town.

Delays are dangerous, e'en to conquerors,
For hours are sharpest weapons to thinking
foes.

Faster than spider's web are spun fresh hopes,
Fresh plots and plans, by busy brains, while
winds

Are drying drops on sword and helm and
lance.

Unless through lengthened reign of peace it
comes,

The rust that dims knights' arms dishonoreth
souls.

Faith! Campaldino's battle taught me more
Than all the lore of chivalry I learnt
Through youth.* It was a glorious fight.

* Vide Napier's *Florentine History*.

GUIDO.

Why sigh
As if to thee a twelve months' lapse from war
Seemed centuries? Art warrior more than
poet?

DANTE.

My prisoned sighs burst forth from darkened
heart
Like slaves long pent up in cold cells; but war
Was not the jailor that undid their bars.
'Twas love who broke their chains—op'd wide
the door.

The thought that I could prate of fight long
past
When light of one fair star doth wane apace,
Brought contrite heaviness unto my heart.

GUIDO.

Sweet Beatrice oft is ill, 'tis true,
But herbs and potions will restore her
strength.

DANTE.

The jealous angels hover near her couch;
The rustle of their wings is in my ears;
But once these arms enfold her as my bride,
My love will fetter her to earth till time
Hath gently weaned us from warm joys of
earth,

And sobered us to thoughts of heaven alone.
GUIDO.

But she's di Bardi's bride.
DANTE.

Mine is her heart,
And mine she is in life here and hereafter.
The little songs I sing of her to-day
Are prelude to the greatest poem I'll pen
To glorify her name—her saintly love
Will send me wondrous visions, never seen
By mortal men—Hell's gate shall ope to me
And Purgatory's painful path shall lead
My weary steps to Paradise, where 'mid
The shining throng, Beatrice near the throne,
I'll find a sun above the stars of heaven.

[MARCO is seen in the street coming back
to the house: GUIDO at the casement sees
him and waves to him.]

GUIDO.
Here's Marco, amorously sad, while parted
E'en for an hour from his se'ennight bride.

[One of his retainers opens the door—enter
MARCO in haste.]

DANTE.
What stirring news hangs on thy tongue,
Marco?

MARCO.

The swords are clashing once again in Florence:
I passed the brawlers as I hither came.

Another riot, born this morning, hangs
On tongue and town. Each faction fights its
rival.

With his slight escort, Falco pushed his way.
Like frightened pullets in a sudden shower,
The women scurry home.

DANTE.

And whither Falco?

MARCO.

He swore he'd reach the church and Beatrice.

DANTE.

He'd reach the church? What meanest thou?
More lies

Behind thy speech. Out with th' assassin
thoughts

That lurking 'neath thy words, clasp cold,
keen knives

To stab me through and through the soul.
Come forth,

O murderous thieves, to kill my rest, steal
strength;

Better to face worst foe than live in dread
Of ambushed ills. Speak out thy fears.

MARCO.

They say
That Beatrice swooned while in the church—
Is like to die.

DANTE.

To die—no, no—not yet!
My Beatrice must not die! Though all the
hosts
Of white-winged souls and halo-crownèd
saints
Hymn their entralling welcomes to her ear,
My love must charm her back to earth again.
To die—to lie forever hid from eyes
That live but for her beauty. No, not yet!

GUIDO.

So runs the rhyme around life's vestment hem.
The words 'not yet' are woven into fibre
Of fleshly robe we don at natal hour.
'Not yet' and still 'not yet' is clearly read
E'en in our life's old rags.

DANTE.

She can not die
Till I have sung my lady's fame to heights
Untouched by poets yet of any age.

GUIDO.

Can sparrow's chirps keep back the floods of
heaven?

Can aspen's trembling stop the thunderbolt?
Can man's weak moaning stay one dart of
death?

Dante, where hides thy loved philosophy?
DANTE.

Go ask the cautious snail when earthquakes
rend
The meads and mounts, where lies his trusty
shell.

GUIDO.

Friend, friend, must all thy future dreams
end thus?

DANTE.

I have no future if my lady dies!
Shall worms wax fat beneath her coffin lid
Upon her dainty limbs? No—no—O God!
She must not die.

[*Sits with his head buried in his hands.*]

MARCO.

Dante, arouse thee from thy dreams of love.
As patriot arise, there's harm afoot,
One of my men o'erheard some private speech
Of enemies who doom thy friends to death,
Defeat to all thy plans, and banishment
For thee—

DANTE.

A plot to drive me hence! They'll fail!

But through their knavery, my tenure then
As Prior may be short, yet long enow
To hold rebellious Florence in my grasp.

GUIDO.

This means cursed Corso's work. O Dante,
act!

Surround him and his men while in the streets
And trap the crafty vulture in a net.

DANTE.

In the open men must snare great quarry:
Treachery is poor stepping-stone to honor.

[*He takes out his tablets and writes on one.*]

MARCO.

Wilt see us murdered?

DANTE.

Florence will judge these men:
My wise colleagues, the Priors, loathing
feuds,
Are weighing means to end these senseless
brawls.

[*Holding up tablet.*]

This summons them to meeting in the Square.
Then the will of Florence ye shall know from
me.

[He hands the tablet to some of his men with a few words aside. The men leave instantly.]

'Twill take most active heels and subtle brains
T' outwit Durante Allighieri!

GUIDO. [At window.]

Thy hawks are off, soaring as for a prize,
They'll cleave the crowd, and soon be fluttering back.

[Enter FRANCESCA NERLI, GIOVANNA and ladies and DINO and GEMMA DONATI and attendants.]

DANTE. [Rises, and hurriedly meets them.
The ladies surround him.]

What news, Giovanna! Speak!

GIOVANNA.

Would that to-day had never dawned, Guido!

FRANCESCA.

Ill, and no one nigh!

LADIES.

'Alas, sweet Bice!

DANTE. [Impetuously.]

Resolve these sentences to sense. Speak out!
The truth—where is Madonna Bice? Speak!

FRANCESCA.

When she fell fainting in the church, the crowd

Waxed great. Her father's men cleared
space around;

One of her women sent the clown to us.
Little we recked 'twas Bice needed help,
When with a jest we sallied forth to her.

DANTE. [*Laying a hand on DINO's arm.*]
Dino, the truth—Beatrice—

DINO.

Fear not;
No harm befalls her in the church. Her
maid
'Awaited us beneath a porch near by.
The street, impact with battling, raging men,
Placed barrier betwixt us and our goal.
So Falco shouted through the surging crowd:
'Haste thou and house the women; then re-
turn
With men to bring our Beatrice home.'

DANTE. [To LAPO and men who are coming
in.]
Arm yourselves. Fellows, haste! Get arms
—we must
To Falco. Haste!

LAPO AND OTHERS.

Ay, we'll get arms. Both legs
And arms are at our master's service.

DANTE. [Imperiously.]

Haste!

[*Exeunt LAPO and men. DANTE takes sword from wall, which he examines. Also, a dirk.*]

GEMMA.

O day of woe!

FRANCESCA. [To MARCO.]

O, if my love is dear to thee, stay here!

I do implore thee go not into Florence.

MARCO.

If Florence were a maid and I most false
Thou couldst not speak of her more jealously.
I must get men and join the Priors and Dante.
Fear not, sweet spouse, I'll be with thee anon.

[*He embraces her and goes out.*]

FRANCESCA. [To DANTE.]

O Dante, use thy power to end these feuds.
Thou swayest our town; stir it to better issues.

DANTE.

Ay, we need men to rule with iron hand,
To quell the strifes that ruin the city's
strength.

These sad divisions mine our party's force,
Like glacial cracks, which split the avalanche
That had resisted centuries of storms;
By its internal parting rent at last

From lofty mountain once it proudly crowned,
And in its fall annihilates itself,
As well as country that it falls upon.
In vain we call on patron saint, St. John,
And trust him as defender of our town,
While in our hearts are lingering bitter hates
Proclaiming us still worshippers of Mars,
Whose statue yet adorns the Ponte Vecchio.

GEMMA. [Aside.]

Now let my woman's will beat down my
fears,
And like a conqueror o'er-ride my heart,
Till I have played my desperate part to-day.

[Approaches DANTE.]

[Aloud.]

'And must thou go with Falco's men?

DANTE.

Could I

Wait here, not knowing how my lady fares?

[Impatiently.]

Where linger those base knaves? We must
away!

[Re-enter LAPO and men, armed.]

'At last! Now forward! Haste to join thy
master,

'And fight for him as if, by San Giovanni,

Thy soul's salvation hung on each sword
thrust.

THE MEN.

By the three kings we swear it, we swear it!

DANTE.

Away!

[GEMMA starts to follow him. Exit with
men.]

CURTAIN

ACT III

Church of San Giovanni: Vacca Tower in the distance. The Square is full of holiday seekers—some already quarrelling. On the right two nobles sit playing chess. On the left, people are gathering. There are citizens, soldiers, an ass driver selling milk, a charlatan calling his wares, boys playing hazard with dice.

CHARLATAN.

Come, come! Be thine own apothecary.
Ho! Presfo! Try but the breadth of fly's
wing
Of this magic salve, and mend thy bones;
Rub but a gnat's weight of it on thy bald head
And lo! Thou'l have an avalanche of hair.

[CHARLATAN *himself is bald.*]

FIRST CITIZEN.

Body o' Bacchus! thou hast not tried it, then,
Upon thyself!

SECOND CITIZEN.

Faith, the bear needs his own grease.

CHARLATAN.

Doth thy wife, blackbeard, keep the street
awake

With loud, unseemly clamors in the night?
Oil but her tongue with this—I'll promise
thee

The chatter will cease.

SECOND CITIZEN.

'Twould be a charity
To use his salve upon his chattering tongue.

CHARLATAN.

And kinder still, to use it on thy wit.
A PEASANT. [To CHARLATAN.]

Is't good for earache, for that doth plague
me much?

CHARLATAN.

Ay, and for the tooth and stomach ache, old
man.

[*He sells some.*]

FIRST CITIZEN.

I'll try the varlet's wares to test his words.

CHARLATAN.

Doth memory fail—but rub this on thy tem-
ples,

And thou'l recall what happened ere thy
birth.

ASS DRIVER.

Now, surely, as the devil hath a tail,
Thou must be rubbing thine own temples well
To recollect all thy long-winded jargon!

[*Crowd closes around CHARLATAN.*]

[*A lady enters and passes the chessplayers.*]

[*A boy is nailing NOBLE's cloak to the bench on which he is sitting.*]

LADY.

Greeting, good Ser, greeting to our friends.

[*NOBLE attempts to rise, but is held fast by the cloak nailed to the bench.*]

LADY.

Still thou sittest; thou hast no manners, man.

NOBLE.

In vain I try to rise, by San Giovanni!

LADY.

I prithee swear not. Tho' thy tongue rapped out

In good round oaths the name of every saint,
Thy sophistry would not convert my logic.

[*NOBLE springs up, leaving part of cloak fast.*]

NOBLE.

Madonna! Thou seest my cloak was caught.

A nail,

A sinning nail kept my legs laggard. Now
Thou dost not think I would not rise for thee?

LADY.

I think—what matters what I think? Good-day.

[*Exit LADY.*]

FIRST NOBLE.

Ay—but the nail—

SECOND NOBLE.

Ay, ay, butt it, butt it.

FIRST NOBLE.

Thou cursed spike, to spoil both cloak and temper!

SECOND NOBLE.

And game. Who played this churlish trick?

FIRST NOBLE.

Ay, who?

[*He looks round at boys near him.*]

Knowing, his inch of iron I would pay
By promptly putting in his hide some steel.

FIRST LAD.

'Twas he who nailed thy coat.

SECOND LAD.

Thou liest!

THIRD LAD.

Thou liest,
As all the Neri do. Take that!

[*They fight.*]

A CITIZEN.

Fair play,

Ye scurvy Bianchi!

FIRST LAD.

Ho! Out on ye there,

Ye unwashed Neri!

SECOND LAD.

He's hit—ho! he's hit!

A CITIZEN.

Smite him from crown to sole, thou halting
fool!

SECOND NOBLE.

'Tis one more grasshopper down in the dust!

FIRST NOBLE.

Now, Neri, we Bianchi will teach ye courage!

[Enter CORSO and DAL COLLE and retainers. CORSO and his men join in the scrimmage.]

DAL COLLE. [Aside.]

O sin, conceived of fell temptation,
And born of opportunity! In vain
I strive with thee. Seeming afar but shade
Scarce worth the fighting; near, a substance
foul,

Most deadly real—a hydra-headed foe—
A protean horror that entwines around me

Cold, callous coils, till, strangled, I must
yield
Its slave and victim, every sense its own,
While hotter grows the stifling air about.
Hell's breath seems seething up beneath my
feet,
And spirit voices echo—lost—lost—lost!
Yet Marco's grown a deadly foe to-day
And self-defense calls for his swift removal.

[Enter messenger hurriedly and as he
pushes his way through the crowd he
calls out.]

MESSENGER.

Put up your swords—ho! peace the Priors
preach—

Put up your swords, the Priors come and sol-
diers.

[Exit.]

[Some of the fighting stops: the Vacca be-
gins tolling.]

FIRST CITIZEN.

List to the bell. The Vacca calls aloud.
What means this hasty summons? What
new wrongs
Are we to right? What right to wrong
again?

[Enter more citizens.]

SECOND CITIZEN.

'Tis noon; behold me Beppo Bianca here.
My bales t'unpack themselves are idly left,
And I wait to be asked why came I here.
As yet the reason is as clear to me
As addled egg to housewife.

THIRD CITIZEN.

Thine own pate
Must addled be, if thou knowst not that
Dante
And the Priors are meeting here to-day.
This message has been sent throughout the
town.
Ay, Dante's wise and cares for th' common
weal.

SECOND CITIZEN.

Ay, ay; he joined thy guild—most valiant
Lapo.

[Enter MARCO and men; they join some of
the youths. CORSO'S men are pushing to
the wall.]

CORSO.

How, Marco—art fighting for the Bianchi,
When Cesca's father and her kin are Neri?

MARCO.

A Guelph am I, and that's enow for me;
And I defend a friend when he's attacked.

DAL COLLE. [Joining CORSO.]

Thou'rt traitor, Marco, to the common cause.

[CORSO's and DAL COLLE's men surround MARCO.]

MARCO. [To DAL COLLE.]

What treachery is this—Dal Colle—speak!

CORSO. [To MARCO.]

One chance we offer thee—swear faith to us,
Swear that from Florence we will exile Dante.

MARCO.

As I loathe thee, I swear to loathe thine
oaths.

DAL COLLE.

No jesting, man! 'Twixt life and death thou
stand'st.

Give us a yea, thou'l live; a nay, thou diest.

MARCO.

Nay, though it meant for me a thousand
deaths.

CORSO. [Striking him.]

One death thou'l find sufficient for thy years.

MARCO.

Traitors! Not one true man amongst ye all?

CORSO.

As true as steel when 'tis to slay our foes.

[MARCO is attacked from all sides.]

MARCO. [*Wounded.*]

One sword 'gainst three. How brave the
Neri are!

DAL COLLE. [*Striking him.*]

Silence, thou whining dog.

CORSO.

Ay, silence him.

[*One of CORSO's men stabs MARCO in the back.*]

MARCO. [*Falling.*]

Ye villains! O, God be merciful to me!
Be merciful, ten-fold, to my poor Cesca!

[*He dies.*]

[*Cries outside.*]

Donati!

Donati! Down with the Bianchi!

Allighieri!

Make way for Dante!

A CITIZEN.

There Dante comes to cow the fighting mob.

[*CORSO's men separate. Some shield from view MARCO's body. Others attack DANTE's and GUIDO's retainers as they rush in, followed by DANTE and GUIDO CAVALCANTI.*]

GUIDO.

Body o' Bacchus! But some fists strike hard!
DANTE.

Art hurt, Guido?

GUIDO.

No, no; my breath but failed
For lack of space to breathe in 'gainst the
wall.

The shouting mob press on to reach the
church.

'Tis our own men at odds with Corso's crew!

DANTE.

And both are blocking road to Beatrice!
On to church! Out of my way, ye varlets.
[GEMMA *rushes in as CORSO's men menace*
DANTE.]

GEMMA.

O, save him! Spare our Dante! Though all
Florence
Were slain! O, Corso, take my life for his!
[GEMMA *falls at DANTE's feet.*]

DANTE.

Poor maid! Through fright her wits are
wandering.

CORSO.

Art thou a wanton to proclaim thy love
In public street? Hath Dante piped to thee

In secret? Then go to him with my curses:
Our roof no longer shelters such as thou!

[*He thrusts at her and turns away.*]

DANTE.

Such villainy reaps bloody recompense.

[*DANTE places GEMMA in care of friends.*

[*Then, with GUIDO, presses up to church
and enters.*]

[*Enter FRANCESCA with GIOVANNA and
an attendant.*]

FRANCESCA.

Against all warning Marco's thrust his head
Into the lion's jaw's, defying Corso.

GIOVANNA.

Have patience, Cesca.

FRANCESCA.

Mine's gone with Marco.

CORSO. [*Coming up to them.*]

Back, Madonna; we need no women here!

FRANCESCA.

Till solving my sore doubts, my weary feet
Must pace the stones of Florence, though
they burn

The flesh from off my bones like heated
ploughshares.

There is a very cruelty in the air,
A subtle sense of guilt and passion roused.

O, let me to my father—

[*She breaks away from CORSO and, seeing her father, rushes to DAL COLLE who tries to turn from her. She clasps his cloak and sinks upon her knees before him.*]

FRANCESCA.

Here at thy feet,

In all my woman's helplessness, I fall,
Still, still thy child, to plead as in the 'days
When scarce my baby hands could reach thy
knees,

To plead for what to me is more than life—
My husband—O, give me back my Marco!
The crowd was yelping ye had come to blows,
And though I know thy father love is shield
For all thy daughter's wedded happiness,
Still other hearts, more hardened, throng the
streets.

Father, one word from thee will spare me
pain.

Speak—where is Marco?

[*DAL COLLE turns away. She looks at CORSO and sees a spot on his cloak.*]

[*To CORSO.*]

There's blood upon thee!

O, God—if Marco's—

[FRANCESCA rises and through an opening in the ranks of CORSO's men sees MARCO's body. She rushes to the corpse and falls on her knees beside it.]

FRANCESCA.

O, he's wounded. Help!
My Marco, speak! Where art thou hurt?
Look up!
I'm here—thy Cesca—here to tend on thee.
We'll home, and there I'll nurse thee well
again.

[FRANCESCA pauses and realizes he is dead.]

FRANCESCA.

No—no—not that! Speak to me—Marco
—speak!
One word—one little word! My love—my
life!
My Marco—God! Here with him let me
die!

[She flings herself on MARCO's body.]

SOLDIERS. [Entering.]

Make room—give way! For the Priori,
room!

[Enter PRIORI. CORSO's men draw up in
front of FRANCESCA and the corpse,
hiding them from view as DANTE and

GUIDO appear on the Church steps with
FALCO.]

STREET CRIES.

Down with the Bianchi! Neri! Neri!

Portinari to me!

Cavalcanti! Cavalcanti!

DANTE.

We must disperse this crowd so Beatrice
Can restfully be brought unto her home.

FALCO.

And there, God willing, we can nurse her
well.

DANTE. [To the People.]

*Peace! In Christ's name, peace! Have ye
forgotten

*The word first sounded in the shepherds'
ears,

*On that first Christmas Eve? Not Honor,

*Strength, Beauty, Wealth!—but peace! did
angels sing,

Put up your swords; let not your brethren
bleed.

[Mob resumes shouting. PRIORI advance
toward the Church.]

DANTE.

*Peace be with you! This salutation was

**De Monarchia.*

* From our Lord Christ, for it behoovèd
Him,
*As our great Saviour, in this greeting
sweet
*To bless us with the best of blessings—
Peace!

Put up your swords—I say, put up your
swords!

STREET CRIES.

Ay, peace! Peace! Put up your swords!
Hear Dante!

[DANTE descends to the last steps of the
church where the PRIORI meet him.
Soldiers stand on guard.]

RENEWED CRIES.

Allighieri! Dante Allighieri!
Let's hear our poet!—let Dante speak!

[DANTE has been speaking to PRIORI
aside.]

DANTE.

My friends, when I did ask that we should
meet,
'Twas for no idle jest. We do not need
Some strange new pageant—no gay lords of
love
With train of tinselled, white-robed votaries.

* *De Monarchia.*

Such joys belong to calmer hours than these.
We need our grandsires' days when high
dames spun
In distaff glorying more than in their jewels;
*When painted face was deemed a sore dis-
grace,
*And women for simplicity were loved;
*When proudest noble clasped his cloak with
bone,
*And girded waist with leathern belt; when
man
*Felt not the want of rich habiliments.
Possessions have their worth, but they are
naught,
Compared to virtue; think ye money bags
Have handed honored names down to these
times?
We learn that Socrates scarce owned three
minae.**
Would these few ducats satisfy our greed?
Yet, are we wiser than great Plato's master?
We need what served our sires—strong si-
news—nerves
Of iron, with brave hearts and unity.

* *Paradiso, Canto 15.*

** About \$50.

Our town is daily menaced by fierce foes:
We must unite to-day within her walls
If we would conquer enemies without.
We must unite to show St. Peter's Vicar,
That of the Church we are true sons; that
 ne'er
*Is Florentine by quenched, inverted torch
Sent to unhonored grave: Unite to show
The rulers of the world, we hold our own.
These party zeals are like the mountain
 streams
That green the banks they touch, and turn
 the mills;
Of use to farms and hamlets, but grander far
As tributaries to some nobler river,
That, bearing commerce on its bosom,
 sweeps,
Bròad'ning its lordly course to open sea.
The Neri, Bianchi, Guelph and Ghibelline
May influence some towns, but they should
 merge
Into one mighty stream of thought and act,
One grand, harmonious whole, one Italy,
Bearing its wealth, its might, in glorious
 trumph

* Persons excommunicated were buried with extin-
guished and inverted torches.

To the great tossing ocean of the world.
If we would learn proud line in history,
We must attempt the greatest conquest
known—

The conquest of ourselves. We come—to-day—

Devising how we best can peace secure,
For Florence, now with discord rent.

[Draws out a paper.]

And I with my colleagues this paper bring
Here to be signed: an ordinance by which
The inciters of these party feuds be banished,
As baleful to the welfare of this town.

CORSO.

Banished? And who dares banish us?

DANTE.

Thy speech

Betrays thine own perception of the wrong
Thou hast done Florence.

DAL COLLE.

We can no more lay claim to our own souls,
If one man's breath blows us without these
walls.

A CITIZEN.

What say the Priors?

CORSO.

'Ay, let them speak.

A PRIOR.

As spokesman for the rest, I do attest
That we agree with Dante's reasoning.
My name shall witness this.

[*He signs.*]

OTHER PRIORS.

And mine.

[*Signs.*]

And mine.

[*Signs.*]

FIRST PRIOR.

And thus we hope to lessen future bloodshed.

DAL COLLE.

Whose name stands written on that fateful
list?

CORSO.

The Florentines should best decide who'll
drink

From foreign wells—who'll eat an exile's
bread.

DANTE.

The matter is decided by the people.

CORSO.

Then needs no tremor shake these legs of
mine;

The people's choice, the soldiers' friend, the
man

Who risked his head on Campaldino's plain
For our town's sake, needs be her trusty
friend.

SOLDIERS.

Ay, ay, thou art our friend. Long live the
Baron!

GUIDO.

[*Who has been talking with his men.*]

Then long live strife, deceits and lying words.

CORSO.

Thou rascal!

DANTE.

Your quarrel end without these walls.

CORSO.

What—I?

GUIDO.

I, Dante?

DANTE.

Both of ye must hence.

A CITIZEN.

What! Dante's friend share fate of Dante's
foe?

GUIDO.

And thus does Dante prove his love for
friends.

DANTE.

Before the Paradise of friendship stands

An angel with a mighty flaming sword,
And 'Duty,' 'Justice,' are his warning words.
Ere heart of mine can give one beat for thee,
It needs must throb an hundred times for
Florence.

Yet—O, my Guido, if thou couldst but know
How much my heart doth daily throb for
thee,
'Twould ease thy pain at turning face from
home.

GUIDO.

Prate of thy love when thy acts prove that
love.

DANTE.

Necessity, not malice, prompts my acts;
A mightier will than ours controls this day.
'Tis Florence speaks, beseeching peace!
'Tis Florence speaks, and in that name 'de-
part!

CORSO. [Fiercely.]

Not I! The lily-livered poet may.
Let Guido carol loveless odes beyond
Our gates; but I remain. I'm planted here
To stay by people's will—

[*Murmurs among the crowd.*]

'Ay, let them speak!

PEOPLE.

We want the baron! Long days to Corso!
We need Donati! Never banish him!

GUIDO. [To the people.]

Behold your hero's work! A stab in the back!

[GUIDO, aided by retainers, pushes aside the crowd that concealed MARCO's body from view.]

CORSO.

At times, perforce, justice must stain our hands.

GUIDO.

Say 'hate' 'stead 'justice,' as nearer to the truth,

If truth can lodge near thee.

DANTE. [Seeing corpse for the first time.]

O, Marco murdered!

[The murmuring crowd changes and now threatens CORSO.]

A PRIOR.

There lies an honest man; true friend to Florence!

A CITIZEN.

The poor throughout the town will miss his dole.

SECOND CITIZEN.

Ay, banish the man who murdered Marco.
STREET CRIES.

Banish him! Banish Corso!

Let the Priori banish him!

DANTE. [*Conquering his emotion.*]

[*To Corso.*]

Proud man; we only banish thee from home.
Beware thy sins exile thee not from Heaven!

CORSO.

I fear not Heaven, nor hell, nor Church, nor
devil!

And that!

[*Snapping his fingers.*]

For thy short-lived authority!

DANTE.

To kennel, cur! There gnaw thy rotten
bones;

Leave men alone. A thing like thee knows
not

The love of home. And all thy country's
woes

Are less to thee than battling ants in sand.
Thou only feelst what touches thy thick hide.

*Justice and Mercy scorn to notice thee,

* And men but throw a glance at thee and
pass.

* *Divina Comedia.*

[Guards seize CORSO.]

[A Monk, with crucifix held aloft, comes out of the Church. Two ladies supporting BEATRICE follow. They pause and BEATRICE sinks to the ground between them. GIOVANNA joins them. FALCO and DANTE rush to her side.]

DANTE.

Speak, Vanna, is Bice—nay! nay! be silent,
Lest with thy words my heartstrings snap in
twain!

FALCO.

O Beatrice, my fairest flower!

[He bows his head weeping at her feet.]

GIOVANNA.

Ay, weep, Falco, weep, for nevermore shall
we

Be gladdened by sweet Bice's voice on earth.

DANTE. [Who has been gazing at BEATRICE
as though dazed.]

Beatrice—Madonna—Belovèd!

[He kneels beside her and tries to put his
arms around her.]

GIOVANNA.

Stay, stay! Intrude not on a father's rights.

DANTE. [Wildly.]

Away! there are no rights as strong as love's.

She is but mine, still mine—though dying,
mine.

GIOVANNA.

Yet thine no more, unless thou'l claim the
dead.

DANTE.

Dead! My Beatrice dead! My soul es-
caped from me

While still I live!

[*He kisses BEATRICE.*]

Dead! Beatrice!

[*He swoons.*]

CURTAIN

'ACT IV: *Scene I.*

'Entrance to a cemetery near Florence. Enter a band of Pilgrims, chanting. They escort Francesca and Dante's daughter, Bice, who are also in Pilgrim garb. The scene is in fading twilight.

FRANCESCA.

Beneath these sombre pines, my Bice, rest;
Thy will o'erleaps thy strength, and far our
goal.

BICE.

Though twice as far and high before me rose
Range upon range of purple hills beyond
That must be scaled ere Dante could be
reached,
And every step left crimson stain behind;
I'd gladly on, all toil as naught to me,
When it will bring me to my father's side.

FRANCESCA.

And all my steps are weighted with the
thought
Of mine. I am unfathered by grim deeds,
Unsexed by treason, treachery and lies.
Dal Colle's dead, with all his guilt upon him,

Without a moment spared for prayer, struck
down

Amidst the riot fostered by his friends—

BICE. [Crossing herself.]

Pray for his soul,

Forgotten be his sins. He was thy father.

FRANCESCA.

And Marco, slain before his eyes lies there.

[Indicating cemetery.]

The moment that we tarry here, I'll kneel

Beside my Marco's grave.

A PILGRIM.

Madonna Cesca,

Stay not too long, for night is falling fast.

[FRANCESCA and BICE enter the cemetery.]

SECOND PILGRIM.

Alas, that Dante's daughter
Should find these times too perilous for home!

[Enter two TRAVELLERS.]

FIRST TRAVELLER.

Greetings, good pilgrims! Whither are ye
bound?

FIRST PILGRIM.

Away from here, to other stranger shrines.

SECOND TRAVELLER.

We hasten to renew our love for Florence;

For twelve long months we loitered in far Spain,

'And now return to greet old friends again.

SECOND PILGRIM.

May Heaven grant you find your friends alive!

FIRST TRAVELLER.

What mean ye? Has plague swept o'er the city?

SECOND PILGRIM.

A plague of ruffians, ruthless in their crimes.

FIRST TRAVELLER.

Our Priors—what do they?

SECOND PILGRIM.

Alas, the Priors

Were driven forth when Corso ventured back!

His speech inflamed the soldiers, caught the people.

Red riot ruled for days. A council then Was held, and Bianchi banished—Dante first!

FIRST TRAVELLER.

Dante! Durante Allighieri banished!

FIRST PILGRIM.

O, fortune has not smiled of late on Florence;

The city's rife with strife. Sedition breeds
In every court. Peace-loving citizens
Must leave. Their only safety lies in flight.

FIRST TRAVELLER.

This news to us bears tragic import, father.

SECOND PILGRIM.

My sons, betake ye to another town
Until these feuds have spent themselves in
blood.

SECOND TRAVELLER.

To stand almost upon the threshold of
Our homes and then turn back!

FIRST TRAVELLER.

Better than death!

FIRST PILGRIM.

Or torture! Corso spares nor young nor old
Of those who favor Dante!

SECOND TRAVELLER.

We are loyal

And could not turn his enemies. Alas,
That Florence so repays the debt she owes
Her greatest man!

FIRST TRAVELLER.

We will not wander far,
But in some village bide till we can send

Some message unto friends. Farewell, good
father,
We crave thy blessing.

SECOND PILGRIM.

May the Lord protect
Your journeyings. Farewell.
[*Exeunt TRAVELLERS.*]

FIRST PILGRIM.

We may encounter
More travellers to turn back upon the road.

A YOUNG PILGRIM.

Is Rome to be our goal? Is Boniface
The Bianchi's friend? Solve me this riddle
now;
Are we lost flies in priestly web,
Or are we little spiders to be gorged
On sacred Fly's domain?

AN OLD PILGRIM.

I love not jests.
I'm but a pilgrim, not a politician,
To lapse into such idle sophistries.

FIRST PILGRIM.

Those well-fed Politicians—woe to them!
A starving ass is fairer sight to me;
For, at his worst, the beast is but an ass,
While politician oft is ass and devil.

SECOND PILGRIM.

We are too near the blackened ruins of palaces.

Dino, vile Corso's tool, doth spy abroad.
Fagot and steel may lurk in every shadow.
We must be gone!

[*Re-enter FRANCESCA and BICE.*]

So gentle ladies, come!

FRANCESCA.

Ay, let us go. Farewell, thou fatal Florence!

BICE.

Farewell, O beauteous Florence that Dante bore

And yet rejects him from her breast at last.

[*PILGRIMS pass out, chanting softly.*]

[*Enter UBERTO and ANTONIO, in monks' robes, carrying a bundle. They are followed by several young NOBLEMEN.*]

UBERTO.

Here dwell at least some peaceful Florentines,

Who seek no fight since last with death they strove.

Here, side by side, they lie untroubled now.
Though once they hotly clashed their hands to thighs,

And wrote with sword red answer to a scoff.
The traitor years too swiftly steal our
strength,
'And leave us barely time with trembling lips
To say Amen to life's short prayer.

A YOUTH.

Uberto,
Why hast thou brought us to the Campo
Santo?

Why were we told to meet in council here?

UBERTO.

I fain to-night would see my friends once
more,

Ere parting from my home.

YOUTH.

Is this farewell?

UBERTO.

Lest evil days o'ertake two gentle pilgrims
I follow in the friar's wake; until
Their Mecca's reached, I'll guard the wan-
derings

Of Cesca and Beatrice my liege lady.
A lustrous sorrow crowns her loveliness.
Betrayed by Boniface, betrayed by Florence,
Her father roams a weary wanderer,
Well nigh a beggar, through most parts
where one

Melodious tongue is heard. Still proud and
brave

He challenges misfortune and bears its
wounds;

Is driven by blasting breath of poverty
To divers ports—a barque sans sails, sans
rudder.

I go to join our Dante. Will ye come?

'ANTONIO.

I follow thee. My sword is thine till death.

UBERTO. [To the others.]

What, none but we to join the banished
Dante?

Has he then spent his years in vain for you?
Did he not sing to move your sluggish souls,
Teaching the higher life for daily needs?

A NOBLE.

And singing of Spring and happy lovers, aye
Dante

Was erstwhile yclept the baker's happy poet,
So friendly was he with the lower herd.

UBERTO.

For shame to carp at foibles of the great,
Be imitator rather of his virtues,
And draw his shining robe o'er travel
stains,

He won in marching on to victory.

[*He draws his sword and holds it up.*]

Here solemnly I consecrate my life
To highest knighthood, true to Dante's
creed;
To be defender of all woman's honor,
To succor weak and helpless, lead chaste life,
Be true to friend and just to enemy,
Fight for home, for Mother, Church and
Florence,
For unity in all loved Italy.

A NOBLE.

Uberto, thou art right; I'll follow thee.

SEVERAL.

I pledge to follow where our Dante leads.

UBERTO.

Then cloak thine armor with these friar's
robes

To mingle with the pilgrim throng anon.

[UBERTO and ANTONIO open the bundle;
they take out Monk's robes. These are
put on the young men.]

A YOUTH.

By the Holy Rood, I love adventure!

ANOTHER YOUTH.

And I a just revenge on some must take.

UBERTO.

Forget thy private wrongs, forego thy hate,

Till with one voice we Florentines can cry
Shouting defiance at all foreign rats
Who gnaw into the stronghold of our rights.
For love of justice, not for sport we fight;
As free men swear ye all to follow me,
Pure, loyal knights vowed to a noble life.

THE YOUNG NOBLES.

By the three Kings we swear it, we swear it!

UBERTO.

Hush, I hear a step.

[*They conceal themselves. It grows dark.*
Enter CORSO, DONATI and THREE FOLLOWERS.]

CORSO.

Art sure Uberto came this way to-night?

A FOLLOWER.

He left the city with a friend but now,
And Dino said the Campo Santo was
Their trysting place.

CORSO.

Ay, Dino serves me well
As fox to watch this hunted lion's whelp.
The price he asks is Beatrice's hand,
Gemma, in safety housed, demands but peace;
Uberto rears his youthful crest and crows
Defiance to my will—this arrogance

Shall be stamped out, tho' Bice whines for him.

But like a shell I'll grind him with my heel,
Ashes and axe and flood, for all damned Bianchi

My hand can reach—Uberto falls the first.

[*To a FOLLOWER.*]

Guard well that gate, lest he pass unawares.
O envious night, that hides my destined prey
Still from my itching blade. The cursed fool!

[*FOLLOWER crosses to gate.*]

Not till my foot rests on his lying throat
Can my hot thirsting for revenge be sated.

UBERTO. [*Aside.*]

I know 'tis Corso mutters, so beware!
A skulking figure glided to the gate;
We are surrounded. Courage, friends, unite,
And strike a blow to-night for liberty.

[*Aloud.*]

Are strangers here?

[*UBERTO advances.*]

CORSO.

The cub comes to his doom.

UBERTO.

A voice of friend or foe?

CORSO.

Be that thy answer.

[CORSO strikes at UBERTO.]

[To his men.]

Ho, fellows; scatter wide these praying saints.

UBERTO. [Fighting.]

Each pilgrim's rosary to-night is steel.

[The YOUNG MEN throw back their hoods
and rush to the attack. UBERTO wounds
CORSO, and a companion runs him
through. Fight barely discernible in the
dark.]

CORSO.

O, death to reach me through a boy—a boy!

[He dies.]

[CORSO'S MEN flee.]

UBERTO.

To thee our thanks to-night, most gracious
Lord!

[All stand with bowed heads bared.]

Now, onward, friends, and be our watchword
'Dante.'

ALL.

Ay, Dante! Dante! Dante!

CURTAIN

ACT IV: Scene II

Ducal Palace at Verona. A large entrance hall; on one side steps lead out into the dusk of the Garden; on the right is an alcove with heavy tapestries, looped back; in the alcove is a wide casement with a deep window seat. Ink horn and script lie on the latter. In the rear is a door leading to the street.

The curtain rises on a group of pages sitting on the steps to the alcove with hawks fettered.

Enter Jester and Giotto.

FIRST PAGE.

My hawk much faster flies than thine; his eyes

Shine like the jewel in the Ducal ring.

SECOND PAGE.

Mine faster flies—thou knowest it—mark this;

How strong his wing; how sharp his beak.

FIRST PAGE.

Like Dante's.

[They laugh.]

JESTER.

Stealing my jokes? Hatch thine own eggs,
Cuckoo.

FIRST PAGE.

Nay, not thy jokes. They're stale as last year's fish.

Who cracks thy nuts of wit, finds dust within.

[JESTER *tumbles the PAGE over.*]

JESTER.

There, lick the dust, thou most rampageous urchin.

SECOND PAGE. [To Giotto.]

As friend of Dante, urge him smooth his scowls.

The Prince ill brooks the poet's moodiness.

GIOTTO.

Those scowls are born of base ingratitude,
And triple crown of pain; Beatrice's death,
The failure of an embassy—then exile—

SECOND PAGE.

The first was eased by Dante wedding
Gemma.

GIOTTO.

Her brother's infamy gave her to Dante,
His heart is in the grave of Beatrice,
Though wife and babes and friends claimed
e'er his love,
When Dante first found haven in these walls,

* Each wish was granted ere he asked, but
now

Can Grande treats him oft less courteously.

PAGE.

The Prince's wife may answer for such sin.

GIOTTO. [Cautiously.]

Her Highness is both wondrous, wise and
fair.

PAGE. [Laughing.]

And comprehends thy keen diplomacy.

[JESTER approaches GIOTTO with a low
bow.]

JESTER.

Ho! High Day to thee!

Thou puissant father of fat ciphers, hail!

Hail to paternity of nothings!

GIOTTO.

Lies!

JESTER.

Nay, truths, proud painter; didst not make
thee great

**With one round O? With cipher, zero,
naught

Conceive it, fashion it and bring it forth?

* *Divina Comedia.*

** Vide Appendix.

Shall not posterity swear by thine O?

[*Singing.*]

Sing ho!

Giotto's O

Brought fame

To his name.

GIOTTO.

Madonnas meek and holy children may

[*Crosses himself.*]

Keep Giotto's name alive some centuries;

'And may they, too, his body keep alive;

We artists need to live like other folk.

JESTER.

We jesters need to live like other folk.

If brush and chisel warm and feed thee, jokes
'Are food and fuel for me. So room for the
fool!

[*He turns away and dances a few steps to-
ward the PAGES.*]

FIRST PAGE.

'Tis time to feed the hawks, come Beppo,
come.

JESTER.

Ay, feed these majesties who rule this Court.

[*Exit with PAGES laughing.*]

GIOTTO.

How all this royal roystering

Discordant falls upon one poet's ear—
Can Grande has too diverse aims to-day,
This statesman skilled and soldier bold, doth
stretch
Domains throughout the north, and holds
the trust
Of Vicar-General; yet with friends he lays
His rank aside and wastes whole days in pleas-
ure,
His love of learning shared with love of
hawks.

[GIOTTO seats himself and reads.]
[Enter DANTE slowly.]

DANTE.

Most bitter are the tears that dew the bread
Of beggary, spoiling each savory dish
That's doled in charity, arousing thirst
For satiate waters of sweet liberty.

[Pause.]

Ah, had I Midas' touch to turn these trees
To glistening gold, I'd hew them limb from
limb,
And send them swift into the niggard hands
That ope so slowly to remove my wants.
They'd clasp these fast and firm, flinging as
fuel

The golden boughs upon their household
hearths,
Feeding their fire of wanton luxuries
With my hard gilded thanks.

Down, down, thou dream
To thy dominion, shared with silent sleep.
What am I now to prate of gold? A stone
That reckless rolls adown the hill of life;
A feather tossed on winds of charity;
A broken straw, scarce crediting the truth
That once its stalk upheld rich golden grain,
And proudly planted root in native soil.
Gaunt visaged poverty, dull-eyed, lean-
limbed,
With shriveled skin, o'erlapping sunken
paunch,
And ribs like ridges in a ploughèd field—
Thou fearful spectre shadowing my steps,
Where shall I turn to flee thy dread embrace?
The laboring hind who delves his plot of
earth
Scarce heeds the spectral shade o'er threshold
thrown,
Save when crops fail and sickness steals his
hoard
Of hard-earned ducats, and at throat he feels

The tightening grip of want's cold hand and
wakes
Dreading the dawn will bring this ghost his
guest.
But foes, familiar, seem at length half
friends;
Old griefs in some lives grow to daily needs.
Mixed with his crop of fears, a tender hope
Buds slowly with a promise of fresh joy,
And whispers Fortune's smiles may sun him
out
Of humble home into a larger sphere;
But hath no pangs for proud prosperity
He once enjoyed. He neither feels nor
knows
The anguish of regret o'er glory gone,
Eating my vitals like the Spartan fox,
My glutton grief still clamors for fresh food.

O Beatrice! Only thy pure soul
Can soothe my restless spirit's agony.
One thought of thee drives sin and sorrow
far,
As morning sun dispels the summer mist.
Out of my endless grief, a monument
Shall rise, bearing thy name, to honor thee,
Such as no woman ever had before,

And none shall ever know again on earth.

[*He stands absorbed in thought.*]

GIOTTO.

[*Shuts his book, rises and crosses to DANTE.*]

Still meditating on thy poem, Dante?

How deep are thy thoughts digging into hell?

DANTE.

The hell I rhyme is here. This earth affords
The stuff from which one can create all hells.

GIOTTO.

Poor earth—the scape-goat of the preachers!

DANTE.

Thou'rt right. The fault is less the world's
than man's.

Mark Florence, how she weeps as slave, when
she

Might reign as Queen—through evils crushed
to earth,

Poisoned by vice; the asp hid in her breast.

GIOTTO.

Hard words from townsman, Prior and Am-
bassador.

DANTE.

Erst all these things; but now a wanderer,

Bereft of children, wife and lands. Hast thou
Forgot that I am banished, Giotto—Ban-
ished!
Dost thou not know the meaning of that
word?
To live forever out of sight and sound
Of all we love; to bear a felon's curse;
To tread all paths save one that leads to
home;
To live and die unloved, misjudged, un-
blessed!

[DANTE *pauses.*]

And have the children babble on the street
That Dante stole, as Prior, public funds!

GIOTTO.

That's the worst crime they could have forged
on thee.

DANTE.

What matters how the blow falls, so it comes?
All sharpened swords behead, though one
from Rome
And one from Syria date—we die the same.
Ay, theft and murder or arson let them
charge,
And rape and sacrilege—so I am banished,

What matters it by what foul means 'tis
done?

Though at the reckoning it may later count.

GIOTTO.

We need thee, Dante. Since thy exile, Flor-
ence

Is rife with knavery. Men, callous grown,
Are flaunting out their sins in public high-
ways,

As lousy beggar grins in sun-warmed rags,
And loathsome lepers count their hideous
sores.

Thy banishment was due to treachery.

DANTE.

When wily Corso gained the Pontiff's ear
It was Bianchi who sent me to Rome,
Trusting that poet's wit and eloquence
Could win the Holy Father's sympathy
And favorable hearing for our cause.

But Corso lingered, embassy being o'er;
As midwife marks with silken skein the wrist
Of elder twin lest he lose heritage,
So marked he well with sacred cord of Rome;
His love of power that twined it with his
feint

At patriotic zeal. He prayed aloud;

* 'When the Vale was sending to the Seven Hills

Fresh fuel from the Forest to the Altar,
Each stick of wood be an Isaac meekly bound,
For sacrifice, as savory offering
Unto the God of Justice'; but the Pope
Suggested that in the Pontifical thicket
A ram might now be caught, a cause evolved
To rivet rival factions' feuds, creating
A stopgap for the leakage of his power.

GIOTTO.

By one weak act of clemency we saw
Our gold in stranger hands, our houses razed,
The Priors driven forth and Florence fired.
May the Lord out of our future Paradise
Keep Corso.

DANTE.

Fear not, he's pledged to Hell already.
Giotto, our enemies may laugh and gloat
Over the blackened ruins of our homes
And lord it grimly o'er our lands; yet free
Beyond the traitors' grasp my kingdom lies.

[*Touching his manuscript.*]

To-day we weep the lost; to-morrow men
Forget we lived. Peace to our ashes then.

* Vide Appendix.

The vast tribunal of uncounted dead
Dusts dancing feet of wantons; but fresh, full
life
Makes men forget all trace of past. My
name
May live—

GIOTTO.

Forever, Dante!

DANTE.

Ay,

Perchance as poet, that one reads in shade
To carefully replace on silent shelf,
For moths to flirt with and the dust caress.
As man, with heart to bleed, who'll think of
me?

A shade 'mid shadows are we at our best
Living or dead but shadows in the sun!

GIOTTO.

Thy shadow lengthens o'er all Italy!
Bethink thee, friend, thou must exert thy
power
And sway the masses from thine exile roost.

DANTE.

How will a waiting crowd afar be moved
When men beside me fail to mark my words?
Can Grande feared for private ends to join
The Imperial party, hence these petty feuds

Still harass Italy since Henry's death.
We need one sovereign hand to dominate
These countless factions, striving each to rule.

[*Noise of laughing and talking is heard.*] I hear the buzzing of the courtly gnats;
Stave off their irksome presence, if thou canst.
The scented twilight lures me to the garden,
When dripping wax and torches light these halls,

'A myriad of fire-flies will flash their sparks
Against the darkening pines, in rivalry
Of winking stars that gem the blue above.
So let the sunset deepen into night,
Without my wearied presence at the Court.

GIOTTO.

Thy wishes, Dante, are commands to me.

[*DANTE thanks Giotto with a gesture and goes into the garden by the steps.*]

[*Enter PAGES and COURTIERS, followed by DINO BRUNINI and RETAINERS.*]

'A PAGE.

A messenger for Dante Alighieri!
DINO. [To Giotto.]

So, Ser, we meet again.
GIOTTO.

As much good friends
As when we parted.

DINO.

Ser, I cry thee quits;
The friendship was of thy conceiving then.
For merrily your tongue wagged with your
brush
When limning Dante's features, and abuse
Was e'er my portion.

GIOTTO.

I knew thee craven,
Siding with Dante's enemies, and time
Hath justified my scornful words to thee.
Thou'st favored puddings more than politics,
And wine and wenches more than Pater-
nosters
And daily Aves learnt in thy damned creed.

DINO.

The artist's angered. Body o' Bacchus, Ser,
Thou art but quicksand of false pride—pitfall
Of seething passions; prickly hedge of tem-
pers!

JESTER.

'Tis sweet to note these doting doves con-
verse!

GIOTTO.

What is thy errand here, Ser Dino? speak.

DINO.

I bring from Florence message unto Dante.

GIOTTO.

I put no credence in such embassy.

DINO.

All prejudice, good neighbor—prejudice.

GIOTTO.

Nay, libertines and cowards suit me not.

DINO. [Restraining his ire.]

Not when the liberty of libertines

'And coward's courage can send Dante home?

[Hands papers to GIOTTO.]

JESTER. [While GIOTTO is reading.]

How warring spirits love to shave their souls
Till not one hair of conscience bristles still;
'And petty virtues harbor greatest vices.

Commend me to the knight who laughs the
best.

DINO.

Then I'm thy model; fighting charms me not.
Nor politics, nor all that furrows brows;
Nor wasting wars; nor turbulence that mars
Our pleasant pastimes, stunting crops and
vintage.

Security's round paunch beseems me more
Than pale anxiety's lean shank.

JESTER.

Why then
Dost thou embark upon an embassy?

DINO.

I like the sights at stranger courts; to learn
A newer mode of jerkin's cut; fresh gossip.
And maids and matrons smile the same abroad
As wenches do at home.

JESTER.

Thou'rt a proper man—

DINO. [To GIOTTO, who is standing apart
meditating.]

Well, shall I send for leech to loose thy
tongue?

GIOTTO.

So light thy words, they scarce the atmosphere
Did stir; so weighty all my thoughts.

DINO.

Come, come,
I'll share them.

GIOTTO.

Thou! Can toads fly?

DINO.

Ay, in a shower.

GIOTTO.

The witchcraft landed them in air
To pitch them back into their proper puddles.
No wings bore such from earth. Can thy
thoughts fly?

DINO.

Ay, to my dinner.

GIOTTO.

Then fly thou with them.

DINO. [*Aside.*]

What gentle wit; what dainty courtesy;
I love that man—to canonizing him.

[*Aloud.*]

Give me the papers; I must to the Prince.

GIOTTO.

As all thy friends are Dante's enemies,
He'll place small faith in thee as messenger.

DINO. [*Changing his tone.*]

Then Dante may in exile end his days.

Come, let our hands now meet in friendly
grasp.

If we seek exercise for hip and heel,
Let's weary limbs to lightsome tune and
verse,

Instead of clashing steel, try Ridda's maze.*

GIOTTO.

'Tis well for those who stay at home to cry
'Dance, dance; shake merry tambourine aloft,
'And clasp glad castanets'; but what of those
Who wend their halting steps abroad from
Florence?

* The Ridda was an old dance with song.

I will to Dante, and impart thy news.

[*Exit to garden.*]

DINO. [To a COURTIER.]

When does the Prince return?

FIRST COURTIER.

We wait him daily.

SECOND COURTIER.

See, the Princess comes to hear thy embassy.

[*Enter GIOVANNA D'ANTIOCHIA and LADIES.*]

JESTER.

Way for the Princess! Now is thy time,
Dino!

DINO.

Pray Fortune's Wheel play me no trick, and
drag

Me smiling 'neath her rim to leave me
powder.

JESTER.

Then mount it, man; be off and grab the
spokes.

DINO. [*Advancing.*]

Most gracious Princess, I—

JESTER. [*Interrupting.*]

Ho, seize him as a traitor!

PRINCESS.

As traitor, why?

JESTER.

No true man he, madonna.

DINO.

For shame!

JESTER.

For truth! I'd rather cry, good Dino:
So well equipped; not e'en a hole upon him;
No rag nor tatter from his crown to sole.
Thus playing gallant, he is still a beggar.

DINO.

That here I stand a beggar, is a fact:
This my petition; this I beg thee read!

[*Hands paper to PRINCESS.*]

PRINCESS.

We bid thee welcome to the Court, Brunini!
[*Looks at paper.*]

From Florence—about our poet? Where is
Dante?

JESTER.

In hell or purgatory. There he sups.

[*All laugh.*]

And spends the nights, too, when the fit's
upon him.

DINO.

I come from Rome as well as Florence. The
Pope
Would gladly reconcile contending feuds.

PRINCESS.

That's difficult.

DINO.

But Mother Church ignores
It's difficult.

PRINCESS.

Unto the Church we bow
Trusting her keener judgment will spy out
Solution where our poorer sight has failed.
Thus, full of plans, thou layest pleading hand
On papal skirt. But peace—not war—thy
theme?

DINO.

Peace with our foes, who might become our
friends.

When Emperor Henry died, the Bianchi
Lost all their hope. The Neri, now in power,
Proclaim to exiles pardon, if they will
Perform due penance.

PRINCESS.

And will the haughty Dante
Brook these measures? His pride grows
with his years.
His pride will ne'er wear out till torn by
death.

[*Turning to PAGE.*]

Haste thou to him, and say we wait him here.

[*Exit PAGE.*]

JESTER.

Why's death more philosophical than Dante?

PRINCESS.

Say on.

JESTER.

He sings of Heaven and Hell, while
death

Sends thee to one or th'other.

PRINCESS.

Thou art starving,
So lean thy wit. Go get thee dinner, fool.

JESTER.

* Shall I then feed on Dante's pile of bones?

PRINCESS.

Beware! Thou'l^t breed contention from
those bones.

JESTER.

I'd rather pick a bone than quarrel with thee.
Crowned fools are ever enemies to dread.

A PAGE.

Here Dante comes, as sober as a night owl.

[*Enter DANTE, walking slowly. COUR-*
TIERS bow before him with mock cere-
mony.]

* *Vide Appendix.*

ESTER. [To DANTE.]

Has hell's breath singed thy black locks to a
crisp?

A YOUTH.

Purgatory's diet has left him pale.

A PAGE.

Good Ser, wilt let us take a jaunt with thee
When wandering into the nether world?

SECOND PAGE.

Mayhap he'd drop thee straight into the
Styx.

A MAIDEN.

Dante, what didst thou find on reaching Hell?

[DANTE advances. The JESTER, behind
him, imitates his walk. Seeing DINO,
DANTE starts and stands still. JESTER
recedes in the crowd.]

[There is a pause.]

PRINCESS. [Turning, and seeing DANTE.]

Ah, Dante! News—ay, news for thee from
Florence!

She offers thee the freedom of her gates;
Recalls the exiles. Read, and prove my
words.

[Gives paper to DANTE.]

There's trivial fine to pay, and but slight
penance.

DANTE.

To pay one copper's value of this fine
Would mean the worth of conscience. Fined?
For what?

Through weary years of exile, clean I've kept
Mine honor. Ye, who brought this message,
go—

Tell knaves who sent it here that not till Flor-
ence

Wide opens gates to me with loyal welcome,
Acknowledging the gross injustice done,
Will she within her walls behold me more.

PRINCESS.

Bethink thee twice before thou dost refuse.

DANTE.

To end my exile with disgraceful act,
With penance, fine! 'Mid pardoned convicts
stand

On Saint John's festival, within the church,
The penitential candle in my hand!

Have rites and gifts restore my townsman-
ship!

* Three lustres of an exile borne, should I—

* I, Dante Allighieri, so return?

* Does innocence deserve crime's punishment?

* Shall I, housemate of pure philosophy,

* Be offered up like idle school boy bound?
The time was when I swayed the people's
voice:

In truth, I said: 'If I here sit, who stirs?
If forth I go, who stays?' But now few
care

Whither I wend my steps. Ingratitude
Is freezing life-blood in my townsmen's
veins.

DINO.

Does hate, then, cancel all thy love for Flor-
ence?

DANTE.

Nor flood, nor flame could cancel love like
mine!

The City's roughest stones are jewels to me,
And though my bones may lie in exile's grave,
My soul's not banished. Florence is part of
me,

And I of her; and linked our fame or shame.

DINO. [Aside.]

The links, methinks, do gape a bit apart.

[*The JESTER has been pulling the PRIN-
CESS's sleeve.*]

* Dante's *Epistle*.

PRINCESS.

Here has the fool been plucking at my sleeve:
Speak out thy message unto Florence, fool!

JESTER.

Tell her, though Dante gives in name, in
nature

Forgiving is he not; and though enduring,
Through fontal vows, through exile he is
never.

[*All laugh.*]

PRINCESS.

My wonder is such fool can win applause
Of all the Court, while thou, so wise, dost fail.

DANTE.

Thy wonder dies, didst thou but know this
truth—

Similitude of taste gives friendship birth.

PRINCESS.

Keep to thy poet's province. Thou art not
worth

Thy salt as jester.

[DANTE starts to retort. Giotto restrains
him.]

GIOTTO. [*Aside to DANTE.*]

The ass sticks out of lion's hide on Dino,
As sting of bee lurks in Giovanna's honey.
Up, Dante, up; discomfit all thy foes;

Unleash the panting dogs of thy proud mind,
And hound these idle mockers to a bog,
Where they will flounder with their sophis-
tries.

Though thou art poet banished, still thou'rt
man.

PRINCESS.

Still obdurate, wise Dante?

GIOTTO.

I read No

In every line and wrinkle on his brow.

PRINCESS.

Unbend thy dignity. Accept these terms.

DANTE.

Here is my answer.

[He tears the paper to shreds.]

PRINCESS. [To DINO.]

Then thy mission ends.

DINO.

I crave a private hearing with our poet.

I have much for his ear alone.

PRINCESS.

Ye can

Withdraw and season with your oil and vine-
gar

This salad embassy.

[GIOTTO lingers a little apart near the cur-

tained alcove, into which DANTE retires with DINO.]

DANTE.

Out with the motive of thy coming—haste!
DINO.

Thou hast a daughter, Dante—young and
fair;

Hast thought of wedding her?

DANTE.

I'd rather light
Her funeral pyre than wedding torch.

DINO.

She's grown
The prettiest wench alive. To see her pass
On way to church, invites a man to prayer.
There is a breath of spring about the girl
That rouses freshness in the dullest blood.
Ay, Dante; by my troth, I'd wed her fairly.

DANTE.

Thou! *Thou!*

DINO.

Give her to me, I'll promise thee
Full pardon; swift return to Florence.

DANTE.

Wretch!
Out of my sight—my reach! before these
hands,
Spite thy white hairs, to silence strangle thee,

Decrepit hypocrite!

[DANTE seizes him.]

DINO. [Screeching.]

Help! He's killing me!

[DANTE thrusts him aside.]

DANTE.

Dog!

[GIOTTO advances.]

DINO. [Staggering.]

I'm mauled because I offer liberty!

I'm maimed for offering Bice wedlock!

DANTE. [Starting after him.]

Let not thy unclean lips profane a name

The angels hold as sacred. Get thee gone.

[DINO slinks away.]

GIOTTO. [To DANTE.]

Of marriage spoke that tottering, hoary
beast!

DANTE.

Away the recollection of this hour!

Nor in the days to come shall she be wed;

Another bridal is my theme: my country's.

*Console thyself, Italia, for thy spouse—

*Our century's joy, thy people's glory—
comes!

*He hastens to thy nuptials. Dry thy tears—

*O, beautiful of the most beautiful!

*Dante's *Epistle*.

Weave wreaths and burnish gems; strew tender flowers
Adown the paths. Bring forth the sealèd wine;
Spread sumptuous feast; shout out the bridal hymn;
Hang up gay banners; light the wedding torch,
For Liberty will come to be thy spouse!

[GIOTTO motions to DANTE to be silent, lest he be overheard, and slowly leads him away.]

DINO.

Unchanging is that poet's frozen No.
I must depart, and bid ye all, farewell.

PRINCESS.

Accept our hospitality to-night,
Unless too gay our court festivities,
For one who, Tuscan bred, may be austere.

DINO. [Hurriedly.]

I am a Florentine, but not a Dante;
Nay, pressing matters urge me straightway home.

[DINO salutes the PRINCESS and COMPANY, assembles his retainers and as he leaves speaks to DANTE.]

DINO.

Thy insolence, I will requite, proud poet.

[Exit.]

PRINCESS.

Now for our pastimes. Wilt thou join us,
Dante?

DANTE.

The woes of bitter heart should not be bared
For foes to scoff at. Silence enfolds them
best.

My somber presence ill befits these halls,
Filled with delight and jests. I crave in-
dulgence

To sit apart.

[DANTE withdraws behind the arras.]

PRINCESS.

We will not bide his pleasure:
So, friends, proceed to trip the jaunty measure.

ESTER. [Singing]

Let's shake the walls with our wild jests and
laughter;

In youth let's lusty be, and buried after;

So hang up the lance

Live, quaff, sing and dance,

And love, love, love till the crack of doom,

O!

[Dances.]

PRINCESS.

Well jumped, my nimble Jack. There's for thy pains.

[*Gives ring.*]

Now, ladies, shall we tread a lively measure?

[*Music begins, and PRINCESS and LADIES dance with COURTIERS. Noise is heard outside. The music breaks off amid cries—*]

Dan Giovanni to me!

Slay the villains, slay!

[*The court rush to the doors and windows.*]

NOBLES AND LADIES.

A rescue! A rescue! The Pilgrims come!

[*Noise continues outside.*]

[*UBERTO rushes in, his monk's hood thrown aside, and carrying BEATRICE ALLIGHIERI fainting in his arms.*]

PRINCESS.

What means this turmoil?

UBERTO.

Treachery, great Princess!

We claim protection for our little band,
And justice for the lawless knaves without
Who tried to abduct this gracious lady.

[*Enter FRANCESCA, and others.*]

PRINCESS.

This Court shall shelter her, ne'er fear!

[*Loud cries outside.*]

Ho, there!

Seize every man who lurks without these walls!

[*Soldiers who have come in from the left, rush out again by the door through which UBERTO DAL COLLE entered.*]

DANTE. [Entering hurriedly.]

I heard a cry of Florentine for help.

BICE. [Recovering.]

O father! father!

DANTE.

Beatrice here!

[*They embrace.*]

FRANCESCA.

Yea, take her to thy heart. There is her haven.

We fled from Florence. Evil eyes had spied Her loveliness. Let once the vulture look Upon the dove, she's lost unless her wings Waft her beyond his cruel ken.

DANTE.

My Bice!

Great love did move thy weakness to fare forth,

Tempting the untried terrors of the road.
Francesca! friend of happier days, thrice welcome!

FRANCESCA.

And here's a loyal knight who served us well.
[She indicates her brother UBERTO.]

DANTE. [To UBERTO.]

The stripling has, at last, then, grown to man;
A sound, strong branch, upon a rotten tree,
Hath put forth leaves.

UBERTO.

I'll die for thee!

DANTE.

Uberto's voice has still the old ring in it.

UBERTO.

Uberto's heart has still the old love in it.

DANTE.

O exile, from the depths of Mara wells
Some drops of sweetness mingle with thy gall!
How womanly my Beatrice grows—
But yesterday she seemed a timid child.

[To FRANCESCA, watching BICE greeted by PRINCESS.]

FRANCESCA.

Our Southern sun warms swiftly buds to blossom,

[*Great commotion outside. Enter soldiers and Pilgrims, with DINO and his men, guarded.*]

PRINCESS.

Thus do false Florentines betray their own!
Behold a guest, scarce parted from his host,
Swoops down upon a band of holy pilgrims!

UBERTO.

But found that some monks' frocks hide coats
of mail.

PRINCESS.

Stand forth, and let thy townsmen see thy
face.

[*DINO is dragged forward before the Court.*]

DANTE. [*Springing toward him.*]

Thou miserable cur—skulking in shadow,
To do the deeds that sunshine execrates.

UBERTO. [*Drawing sword and rushing toward DINO.*]

So thou, the lying knave hiding in darkness,
Now, in the light, defend thyself to death!

[*DINO shrinks from them.*]

PRINCESS.

Hold, Messers, hold! and fight without this
Court.

[*A courtier draws UBERTO back.*]

[DANTE disarms DINO and flings him across the room.]

DANTE.

I'll not soil hands with hoary sinner's blood,
But let him keep that mystic bauble life—
The crystal ball, wherein the angels watch
Men's good and evil deeds. These moving scenes

Will soon slip from this aged jackal's hand.

PRINCESS. [Turning to DINO.]

Lest that our ire at this treachery
Send thee to hell, without a priest or shrift,
Betake thee hence in haste, Ser Dino—Go!

[*In the lull, DINO's men rush him out, causing murmurs in the Court, but the band is allowed to depart.*]

PRINCESS. [To Pilgrims.]

Lay every staff aside to-night. To-morrow
Resume your saintly pilgrimage, refreshed,
Leaving with us your gracious benediction
For our most willing hospitality.

[Turning to FRANCESCA and BICE.]

Fair ladies, you are welcome to our Court,
Long may you tarry to delight our eyes.
Anon we wait you at the festive board.

[She salutes ladies, DANTE and UBERTO, then goes out with courtiers and pilgrims. DANTE is left alone with BICE, FRANCESCA, UBERTO and Giotto.]

FRANCESCA.

Now for thy news. Dante, we long to hear
Of all thou sawest in thy varied travels.

BICE.

Our thoughts have pictured thee these weary
months

In many places and in varied moods.

O, let us know how near the truth we drew.

DANTE.

Through our loved land I wandered, passed
to Paris;

Sitting on straw, and drinking 'learning in,
I heard bold lectures from the sage Sigier.

Or, rambling near the Seine, marked the sad
house

Where Abelard fair Héloïse once taught
Latin and Love together—beginning life
More than a monk, to end more monk than
man,

While she a cloistered lifetime spent to rue
A few wild days of passioned love and youth;
Then sailed to white-cliffed isle where Edward reigns,—

Son of the Longshanga of adventurous fame,
Tarried in London by the lordly Thames,
Touched Oxford's hallowed ground, where
once of yore

Great Alfred widely lit that little spark
To fire some centuries of learning—saw
The state of University's great hall,
Which Durham's will did well endow, and
Baliol,

Founded by Scottish king; I saw the house
Where dwell the Merton scholars, which the
wise

Walter de Merton once from Malden moved
To Oxford; viewed fair lands and strong
hewn castles,

The gentle hills, deep vales and yielding soil,
The strong-limbed race that fills this teeming
isle,

And marked the blue waves beating watch
and ward

Around this sturdier Venus of the sea;
Retraced my steps with longing infinite,
To find my Florence still porte close to me!
My people—O, what have I done to thee *
That thus in exile I must weep my days?
Since then life is to me but empty shell,

* Dante's *Epistle*.

From which, crab-like, I've crawled to lose
myself

In ocean of a sorrow infinite—

FRANCESCA.

Rude Fate, with grimdest deeds of blood
Hath thrown a haze of red on our horizon;
But think thou of our joyous youth, when
Guido

'And Marco jested with la Primavera
'As e'er we called fair Vanna, and of glad
days

We passed in Portinari's scented alleys.

DANTE.

Ah, how thy words recall the time when
youth

Was hot upon me, and life full of love.

To some Love dancing comes, all roseate
crowned

Holding to lips his nectar sparkling cup;
To me he tendered poison-draught to drain.
At times he speeds in golden sheen—a Fay
Strewing man's pathway with most precious
gifts,

Anon he crawls to hearts as subtle snake;
There fastening fangs, feeds to satiety.
So Love stole to my boyish breast; I was
No infant Hercules to strangle it.

GIOTTO. [Seating himself near DANTE.]

As ever, joy and grief divide the honors
As hosts at our life's feasts, and we poor
guests.

Still vainly scramble for the higher seats.

DANTE.

The higher seats to-day are filled with rogues:
Corso enthroned in Florence—

FRANCESCA.

Nay, he's food
For worms—killed while trying to slay
Uberto.

DANTE.

Dead! and all his vast ambition shrouded
In the grave! He was a foe most bitter
But brave. That cancels many sins in men.
So round the whirling wheels of Fate's proud
car

Levelling out lives, like daisies trodden down
'Neath chargers' hoof; philosophy 'lone
mounts

To driver's seat, but drops the reins in haste
When death cries 'halt'! Ay, all obey that
voice

Whose tones re-echo through all Nature's
gamut.

The proudest pine decays and drops to dust,

'As doth the lowliest weed. So fade the flowers,

So cease the blithest songs, so droop strong wings

That clove the liquid blue of yon fair skies.

Yet, from these ends arise yet fresher lives.

Spring's teeming soil demands last Autumn's dead.

So Nature turns her shrouds to swaddling bands

And lets the spirit of her being revive
In newer songs, and sweeter sights and scents,
Bearing them through, on to Eternity.

And so man dies! his dust feeds future flowers,

While golden thoughts, and glowing words
and deeds,

Like tapers priests have blest around a tomb,
Illume his grave, and shed a radiance o'er
His name's short day, serving to light the path

Of those close following. Man dies to live!
O, death from life? O, life from death!

The mind

Of minds, alone this mystery reveals!

[DANTE sits absorbed, his head resting on

his hand, then takes up tablets and writes.]

FRANCESCA. [To Giotto.]

There come the tablets; this mighty poem
Fills me with awe unspeakable; if impious
What vengeance may not Heaven deal to
Dante!

GIOTTO.

Ne'er fear, posterity will glory in his name.

FRANCESCA.

Mark how his brow is knit; how strange his
smile!

To this abstraction he was ever prone.
Once, gone to watch the gayest sight in Flor-
ence,

Pedestrians, singers, gorgeous cavaliers,
Rose-strewing children in a glittering throng,
That wound its shining stream-like way
through squares

'And narrow streets, he stood within a shop
Whose only wares were books. 'As the pro-
cession

Neared to the door, our poet spied a pamphlet
Unread by him. He seized it; lost in
thought,

Read on, nor laid it from his hand till show

Was past and gone. The shouting crowd,
the banners,
The splendid train of horse and men, unseen,
Unheard, unthought of by the dreamer
Dante.*

[*They converse apart.*]

[BEATRICE and UBERTO come down together.]

UBERTO.

Didst miss me, Bice?

BICE.

While in the convent,
I missed all my friends. Life's dull without
home ties.

UBERTO.

Nor hast forgot our merry games?

BICE.

No, no.

[*They have crossed to the steps leading to
the garden, and pause near a bench on
which lie balls and games. UBERTO
throws her a ball.*]

UBERTO.

Come, catch it, Bice, as once thou didst.

* Vide Dante's Life.

[BICE lets the ball pass by. It rolls away down the steps.]

BICE.

We played ball at the convent—not with boys.

UBERTO.

I am now a man.

BICE.

Not man like Giotto.

UBERTO.

I would not be as grave as he. I love
To laugh and sing—lie in the grass and
dream,

Save when I wear a sword to shield my lady.

BICE.

See how thy ball has hopped down all the
steps!

UBERTO.

Anon I'll seek it. Come and sit awhile,
And talk to me as thou didst when a child.

[BICE breaks off some flowers from a
rose-pot and holds them out to him. He
stretches out on a stone bench near her,
his chin resting in his palms.]

BICE.

These roses for a wreath—

UBERTO. [Taking some.]

To crown thee, Bice?

There was a flower game that pleased thee
once,

How ran the rhyme? ‘One rose for each
fair cheek?’

BICE. [Correcting.]

‘For each soft cheek a rose—’

[UBERTO leans forward and touches a rose
to each of her cheeks.]

BICE. [Continuing.]

‘Ten wreaths her golden hair—’

[UBERTO, half-kneeling on the bench, puts
on her head the wreath they have been
weaving.]

‘One for her forehead fair—’

[UBERTO touches a rose to her forehead.]

BICE.

‘And two her lips to close—’

[As BICE says the last line, UBERTO
touches her lips with a rose, and, doing
so, kisses her on the lips. BICE starts up,
dropping the flowers, and moves away.
UBERTO, seeing her troubled look, fol-
lows.]

UBERTO. [Calling after her.]

Bice—Madonna Bice!

[He overtakes her and they walk away in
the garden.]

GIOTTO. [*Looking at DANTE.*]

Dante's a dreamer, and we but shadows
In his dreams! This angers Gemma;
She mourns her lot.

FRANCESCA.

The great must have their foibles;
And faults in husbands, when we love, turn
virtues;
And patience is best coral to cut teeth on;
'Tis the Credo, Ave and Paternoster
Of honest woman's household life—with love
Walks patience, hand in hand, till sweet is
service

That else would grow past bearing in our
lives.

My faith was orthodox in two beliefs;
My God and Marco. They held my hell and
heaven.

[Enter BEPPO, *an old servant of DAL COLLE; he had been with DINO's retainers. He is evidently drunk, and tries to steal quietly into the hall, but stumbles over a bench.*]

GIOTTO. [*Starting up.*]

Who's this?

BEPPO. [*Bowing and stumbling.*]

Beppo—good Ser—only poor Beppo.

FRANCESCA.

He was my father's man—and now serves
Dino.

What brings thee?

BEPOPO.

Requital for my service.

DANTE. [Laying aside script, joins GIOTTO
and FRANCESCA.]

What services? Doth spy for Dino? Speak!
Plots, counter-plots are in the air. Deceits
Are current coin to-day, to pay all scores.

BEPOPO.

Whispers, and elbow joggings, and sly winks,
Are ammunition wasted on myself.

Dal Colle's hints hit but a hard cuirass;

[*He strikes his breast in a drunken manner.*]

Have I not heard the 'Cause'

[*He laughs drunkenly.*]

these fifteen years—

For what? Ay, tell me that. Thou needst
not stare—

The truth will out, Ser poet.

DANTE. [Aside to GIOTTO.]

What meaneth he?

GIOTTO. [*Aside to DANTE.*]

The knave knoweth truly more than suits his masters.

BEPPO.

By the Rood I've waited, moon in, moon out.
I'll wait no more. My silence should be paid,
And services.

[*Hiccoughs.*]

Can they count it my fault
That plans so neatly laid, have borne no
fruit?

DANTE.

What scandal lurks beneath these words?
Speak out!

Better to die through knowledge than to live
Half-dead with dread suspicion. Speak,
knav!

BEPPO. [*Looking up and talking at them again.*]

I need reward for wedding thee to Gemma!

[*DANTE starts.*]

If watchful spy, I had not played for them
On that eventful San Giovanni's Day
When Beatrice died—

DANTE.

Withhold that name!

BEPPO.

And spread reports of Corso's cruelty,
To win for her thy pity. She was apt.
And wept and fainted when we told her
to—

DANTE.

Stay! Give me time to grasp this villainy!

GIOTTO. [To BEPPO.]

Thou drunken fool, hie hence. Thy speech
betrays
Too brutal scheme for honest men to stom-
ach!

BEPPO.

Dal Colle's dead, and Dino swore to-night
He needs no gray-beards in his service now.
By San Michele, I have earned my wage—

GIOTTO.

Then go to them who made thee play the
spy.

[*He pushes BEPPO off through the entrance.*]

DANTE.

The sister false, like brother—false to me!
Dal Colle, Corso, Dino—ay—and Gemma—
Weaving a web to tangle me therein,
To wed me to another while my lady

Still was mine. And all these years I nursed
a lie—

A living lie—warm sheltered in my arms!

GIOTTO.

This tale thou must not take so much to heart.
Madonna Gemma's love for thee was great,
They used her as a tool to serve their ends.

FRANCESCA. [Who has been near the garden
steps, joins DANTE.]

Dante, what moves thee so?

DANTE.

A lie—not new
To thee; one thou hast hidden in thy heart
Full sixteen years.

FRANCESCA.

A lie? What lie?

DANTE.

Thou wert
In league with Corso, Dino and Dal Colle,
And planned to force me into wedding
Gemma.

FRANCESCA.

O Dante! She loved thee!

DANTE.

I know at last
That Corso's anger was but feigned to rouse
My pity till I wed her.

FRANCESCA.

She loved thee!

DANTE.

Her cries, her swoons, were mummeries well
learnt.

FRANCESCA.

She loved thee, Dante, and she loves thee
still.

DANTE.

Thou call'st it love. No love's born of dis-
honor.

She is my children's mother; for their sakes
No public scandal shall attack her name.

But that she did deceive me, fills my soul
With scorn unutterable for herself.

Henceforth we tread our ways apart.

FRANCESCA.

O, let her youthful passion plead for her!
How could a girl, scarce from her mother's
side

Define the boundaries of so-called honor!

She loved!—and strove to win the man she
loved,

Though subterfuge might mingle with her
truth.

Unconscious ill was good, the clay with gold.
Yet it behooves thee, being great, to look

With gentleness on others' sins. Thy heights
Most erring souls could never reach! For-
give!

For dear love's sake, I dare not harbor wrath.

[Pause. Giotto, who has been watching
to see if Beppo has left, rejoins them.

BICE appears from garden.]

BICE.

Dear father, come and roam this beauteous
garden.

No pleasure is joy to me, unshared by thee.

DANTE.

Thou art most dutious daughter, and thy love
Illumines many shadowy nooks in life.

BICE.

My duty twins it with my love. I pity
Thy foes for losing joy of loving Dante.

DANTE.

Thy fondness overleaps the truth, my Bice,
As when a prattling babe thou'dst climb my
knee.

And with big kisses vow I was more dear
Than doll or sugar lamb. My pretty bird,
I missed thy cheery chirpings round my chair,
The years we lent thee to the holy sisters.

BICE.

So said Uberto—that he missed me much.

DANTE. [Startled.]

And thou missed him?

BICE.

I missed all those I loved.

DANTE.

Thou lovest, then, the young Dal Colle?

BICE.

Why should I not? He hath a loyal heart,
Is handsome, brave, and yet, withal, so gentle.

DANTE.

Are not the other youths as well equipped?

BICE.

Ah, none can equal him. So high he stands
In my esteem.

DANTE.

As high as thou holdest me?

BICE.

As high, yet not the same. Thou art my
father;

I owe thee life, and all the days my duty.

DANTE.

Dear child, Uberto is a merry friend.
Methinks he's loyal, but his youth still waits
Upon a tested manhood, and he's son
Of one who was my bitter enemy.
My daughter could ne'er wed Dal Colle's
child.

Sooner I'd have thee end thy days a nun.
Nay, nay. Droop not thy pretty head. All
life

Awaits thee! Thy imperious youth may win
High rank as well as honest heart for spouse.

BICE.

A clown, o'er black bread and goat's cheese
can gladden

The heart of wife beloved, more than a knight
Can cheer his lady o'er red Vernaccia,
Should she, alas, no longer worship him.

DANTE.

Worship is for the saints—not men, dear
child.

What! tears!—tears for a boy thou'st scarcely
seen

Since childish days? Nay, dry thine eyes,
my Bice.

[DANTE kisses BICE and turns to FRANCESCA and Giotto. They cross to the alcove and pass behind the arras. FRANCESCA, about to join BICE, sees her brother returning from the garden. She waves her hand to him, pointing to BICE. Pause.]

[BICE looks slowly around. The sun is setting.]

BICE.

Such glorious sunshine close within my reach,
Such heavy shadows close about me fall,
Such joy and lightness in the scented air.
Such numbing pain and darkness in my heart!
The sunset of my love is nearing me.

UBERTO.

Alone, Madonna Bice, and so wistful?

BICE.

Uberto, wilt grant me favor?

UBERTO.

Ay, 'tis thine
Ere asked.

BICE.

'Tis a message to be safe delivered.

UBERTO.

Entrust it me. Though words to seal my
doom,
They're said.

BICE.

My message is to Heaven.\

UBERTO.

I'd die
To take it; but, through sins, my soul might
slip
Into the shades of nether world instead.

BICE.

There is no need to bend thy life, but knee.
And pur a prayer into the Eternal Ear,
To our Creator, Judge, and Savior pray,
He re-create, and judge and save our Flor-
ence,
Pouring His balm of mercy in our wounds
Of civil discord, till the olive thrives,
In place of blood-stained laurels; and pray,
 Uberto,
For strength to guide thee through these
 troubled times,
And add a prayer for me—

UBERTO.

Thy gentle words,
Madonna, fall upon my waiting heart,
As seed in Springtime from the sower's hands,
Falls on the furrowed ground; from my
 heart's soul,
Inspired by thy virtues, shall spring up
A living crop of holy thoughts and deeds,
Due to thy sowing.

BICE.

O, may the angels' hands
Reap close thy crop for God's own harvest-
 ing!

UBERTO.

I'll pray for Florence, and for guilty self;
But for thy own pure soul, Madonna, prayers
Need but to rise as sweetest benedictions.

BICE.

Do women need less help by prayer than men?
Have we no thorns to tread beneath our feet,
Nor fiery paths to singe our fragile garments?

UBERTO.

We men have more temptations than ye
maids;
We're formed of coarser clay.

BICE.

Yet are ye formed
In God's own type, and must ye then drag that
Such sacred semblance down into the dust?
Let likeness of a God lie in the mire?
Man should be chaste as woman; sin is sin.
Thy stronger nature should uplift thee from
The swinish pleasures of an earthly sty,
From sloth and gluttony, lust, heated cups,
And all the miraged joys of fallen minds.
If woman strive as virgin, wife and mother
To humbly follow Mary's holy life,
Thou hast still higher type, as man, in Christ,
To preach thee perfect love of purity.

UBERTO.

If worldly men would think such thoughts as
thine,
Living them out in simple, daily deeds,
Life's byways would smell sweet with blos-
soms dropt
From Heaven, 'stead reeking of ill-savored
weeds
That sprout from Hell. Though 'tis not
meet for knight
To vaunt his merits to his lady's face,
Yet I can say our race was never prone
To gross delight in sottish pleasuring.

BICE.

I know thee pure, and call thee, therefore,
friend;
Thy fault is rather pride, with all its vices.

UBERTO.

Blue blood must needs run proudly through
our veins.

BICE.

And why? Thy birth, wealth, talents—all
are gifts
From God. As such they should be humbly
held.
My soul in secret oft hath likened thee

To truest knight of brave King Arthur's
Court,
Who sought the Holy Grail. Be thou like
him,
'As humble and as pure, and let thy pride
Live only in good deeds, so I in faith
Can call thee e'er my true Sir Galahad.

UBERTO.

Thine, didst thou say? Would I in truth
were thine!

O Beatrice! Well thou know'st my love.

BICE.

And thou wouldst call me wife?

UBERTO.

If thou wilt stoop
To earthly bliss of wedlock with myself,
Most wisely hast thou read my thoughts,
sweet Sybil.

It needs no skill in keen Cumæan craft
To sift the meaning from thy garnered
thoughts;

No honest man doth say unto pure maid
'I love thee,' save he wills his passion change
Her life's fresh tints to richer, deeper dye,
Her virgin freedom narrowing to fit
A golden circlet, a tiny talisman
That holds in trifling space sweet love enow

To fill a world with Heaven's own joy and
peace.

'And shall my love not win response from
thine?

BICE.

No blush of shame dusks cheek to own my
love,

No passion pales my maiden hue to feel it;
I love thee without thought of shame or pas-
sion.

UBERTO.

Dear lips, O, say those words of life again!

BICE.

I love thee, but I ne'er can be thy wife.

UBERTO.

O Bice, waft me not upon thy love
To Heaven; then dash me down to Hell
again!

BICE.

No hand of mine can ever lie in thine.
If Fate had willed to me a happier lot,
As I do love thee, I had been thy wife.

UBERTO.

Say not 'had'; give me a grain of hope!
Though small as millet seed hid in thy heart,
'Twill grow till it can fill love's granary.

BICE.

If thou light'st love with hope, thy fuel's soon
spent;
I love thee freely without hope or fear,
But, after God, I owe my father life:
He wills I take the veil; I must obey.
But all my prayers and thoughts and love are
thine:
Havened above the stars at Mary's feet,
There lies my love for thee eternally.

UBERTO.

I can not throw aside a heaven on earth
For others' whims, nor sighing let thee pass
A saintly shadow o'er my path, while life
Hot leaping through my veins, still lends a
chance
Of winning Beatrice for my bride.

[*Sounds of rejoicing heard outside. Enter soldiers, courtiers, ladies, pages, GIOVANNA, CAN GRANDE and JESTER.*]

JESTER.

Room for the fool who fights for neighbors'
quarrels!

GIOVANNA.

Room for the victor proudly coming home!

[FRANCESCA has rejoined BICE. GIOVANNA turns to them, taking each by the hand.]

GIOVANNA. [To CAN GRANDE.]

This saintly maid is Bice, Dante's daughter;
This sad-eyed matron Marco Nerli's widow.

CAN GRANDE.

Most welcome to our court, fair Florentines.

[GIOTTO and UBERTO approach CAN GRANDE as courtiers surround him and offer congratulations.]

A NOBLE. [Aside to another.]

Can Grande's sated with his victories,
But his erst friend, our sombre guest and poet,
Refrains from lauding these fine martial feats.

SECOND NOBLE.

Dante had hoped the Prince could push to Rome,

To weld with Emperor a Cæsar's reign.

CAN GRANDE. [To GIOTTO.]

A likely youth, Uberto; he can stay
If so he wills, and stretch our hospitality.

[Looking round.]

No greetings from our poet? How is this?

JESTER.

He's wedged in ice he says awaits in Hell,
So frozen e'en hell's fires melt him not.

[DANTE has come from the alcove and joined BICE and FRANCESCA.]

CAN GRANDE. [Loudly.]

Durante Allighieri has grown dumb,
No word of welcome greets his host's return.

DANTE.

Why waste in feuds, O Prince, the strength
God gives?

'Tis for our country's general weal—not
For fighting quarrelsome neighbors when they
fail

To observe some trivial courtesy our due.

CAN GRANDE.

Hear Dante preaching humbleness, not pride.
Rank has its dues, these should be fully paid.

DANTE.

Proud lives of daring deeds bespeak our
praise,

But we are apt to lavish it on men
Who should claim none. Why must we bow
the knee

To some old noble's son because he bears
His father's name,* unless with noble rank

* Vide Dante's Life and Works.

The youth inherits virtues of his sire?
Noble he's not, and no ancestral coffers
Should be deemed his. How rarely human
worth

Climbs topmost branch of genealogic tree!
Nobility, in its true essence lives
Alone in virtue, valor, art and genius.

JESTER.

Our Prince's triumphs are not valor then?

DANTE.

Such triumphs may yet prove our land's de-
feat,

And stifle in men's souls their freedom's
growth.

While foreign powers tread upon our heels,
Each state is clamoring for supremacy.

If Italy still fears to stand alone
Amid the conclave of the mighty nations,
Let one wise ruler gather in his hands
The reins of government and be our head
Till we have learnt to blend our private aims
In one harmonious whole. Then shall we
rear

Our crest as high as any in the world!

CAN GRANDE.

As Vicar-General shall I then not

Speak out my views, enforcing them with
sword?

Keep to thy dreams of Heaven and Hell, but
spare

Thy patrons sermons they need not! My
weal

Demands my care as much as others' woes.

DANTE. [Passionately.]

Away with selfish thoughts of thine own
good!

A patriot first should serve his country's ends,
Had I ten lives to spend I'd lay them down
At my beloved country's feet, as Mary
Of Magdala anointed feet of Christ.

CAN GRANDE. [With anger.]

O, thou hast chosen well thy time to rail
At those who sit in power while thou art but
An exile lacking even fighting varlets;
To do thy bidding on thy enemies!

DANTE.

Thou speakest as a soldier, the prose of arms;
My power needs not the blood of war for
growth,

'Tis greater than clash of sword and breath
of kings.

God's finger has lain lightly on my lips.
The songs I sing, the sermons that I preach

Will help to bind my bleeding country's
wounds

And shape to Unity our Italy.

CAN GRANDE.

Would Papal power approve of such a
scheme?

DANTE.

Let Popes look to our souls; but purse and
sword

Should fill, unfill, rust, shine, without their
care.

CAN GRANDE.

Be cautious, Dante, for thy speech begins
To touch on heresy.

DANTE.

In faith, Can Grande,
Rank heresy lurks more in ears than tongue.

CAN GRANDE.

Then let's hear less; but come, we'll break our
fast.

*[A feast has been prepared. It is dark
and torches have been brought in. The
court ladies have robed BICE and FRAN-
CESCA in rich mantles and put wreaths
on their heads.]*

DANTE.

With meals to silence conscience, ay, how oft

A stomach, newly filled, will prove ally
To sins the self-indulgent imp within
Had futilely suggested while we starved.

[*The courtiers and ladies and CAN
GRANDE, GIOVANNA D'ANTIOCHIA and
guests seat themselves. Music is played
then.*]

SONG SUNG BY SEVERAL GUESTS

Drink!
To Mars, the God of War and Blood!
High to him in ruby flood!

To the brink
Of goblet gold with sapphires gemmed
Fill! Let not a drop escape.
Offer him the blood of grape.

Mars! We drink!

Drink!
To Venus, fairest Goddess found,
Braced in Beauty, cestus-bound.

Goblets chink
To floating hair and open lids,
To marble limbs no vestments drape;
Offer her the blood of grape.

Venus! Drink!

Drink!

To Pluto, for our passions' fire
Is his, and that mad wine's inspire.

To the brink

Fill high to God of lowest Hell!
By fair Proserpine's rude rape,
Offer him the fumes of grape.

Pluto! Drink!

Drink!

For in the cup lie Fame and Wars
Mightier than the gift of Mars.

Goblets chink.

Drain Pluto's fire in ruddy flood,
Or let the fumes with fancy shape
A Venus from the amber grape.

Ever Drink!

CAN GRANDE.

A lordly song well sung. I drink to thee!

[*Holds up his cup to one of the ladies.*]

Come, Uberto, leave our black-browed poet.
Hath Boniface drawn up new code of morals?
Come join our court; we need some younger
gallant.

UBERTO.

Great Prince—my word—my time, my
thoughts, my life,

Wait but on Dante—Him alone I'll serve—

[DANTE hearing, grasps UBERTO's hand.]

CAN GRANDE.

Thy gravity but ill befits thy youth.

But take thy will: we force no guest to feast.

[He turns to the courtiers and ladies and joins in the laughter and drinking.]

[GIOTTO, FRANCESCA and BICE have left the others; as they join DANTE, UBERTO crosses to BICE.]

UBERTO. [To BICE.]

Has love, the plummet line of woman's heart,
Not sounded thine? Has patient faith no
claim?

Must I still wait without a hope of thee?

BICE.

Can love stretch wings while round us fall
Portentous shadows from my father's grief?

UBERTO.

Love lifts all shadows from this earth;
Its strength, its brightness emanate from
heaven.

Love, like the faithful widow's cruse of oil,
But spends its richness to renew its store;
Increasing power of giving by the gift.

From all the wealth of love stored in thy
heart,

O Beatrice, hast thou none for me?

BICE.

My love is thine, but all my life's my father's.

UBERTO.

On thy knees, go plead with him, my Bice.
Let him but know that all our happiness
Is bound up in each other's being. His love
Will ne'er deny our suit.

BICE.

After my God,
I owe my father duty. What he wills,
I will.

[FRANCESCA joins them.]

UBERTO. [Turning to FRANCESCA.]

O sister, plead for me!

FRANCESCA. [To her brother.]

If thou
Dost fail to move her, how can I?

[Turning to BICE.]

Dear Bice,
Men dare not boast the steadfastness of
women;
They love through passion where we love
through love,

And when thou findest one whose manly
strength

But serves to hold his passion 'neath his will,
O, honor him, the length of all thy life!

Now, on my soul, I deem Uberto true,
I urge thee take such gift as sent from God.

[*BICE holds out her hand to UBERTO.*

*He draws her slowly into his arms and
embraces her. BICE then crosses to
DANTE, and sinks at his feet. DANTE
lovingly raises her. She whispers to
him. UBERTO approaches them.]*

DANTE.

Uberto, come. Most men have played me
false;

Some of thy kindred proved mine enemies.

But thou wert ever true. To thee I trust
My Beatrice—a jewel beyond all price.

Once I had dreamt the blessed maid was
shrined

Sole sovereign virginal in poet's heart,
And wished that my fair child should take
the veil,

Communing close to God, 'mid holy women,
To keep her white cloth free from life's rough
burrs.

But on the tossing ocean of the world,

I've drifted on and on through lonely years;
Still praying for more light, still learning
lessons,
And dare no longer mould men's lives to suit
My will. So, as my Bice's heart is thine,
Bless that dear heart with all thy love,
 Uberto!

FRANCESCA.

For once feuds sleep. Thy friendship, Dante,
warms

Like wine poured by some Ganymede for
Gods.

DANTE,

Jove's nectar from no valley wine is pressed
But from the grapes that scale the highest
crags,

'And mine I plucked while stumbling in the climb,

'And lifting gaze above this earthy mire.

This royal roystering jars upon my ear.

Young Della Scala revels in his youth.

So draw the arras shutting out the sound

Of idle jest dropped from young scoffing lips.

[DANTE slowly returns to the alcove and

closes the arras. Enter pages and DEL-EGATE from Bologna. He is presented to CAN GRANDE.]

CAN GRANDE. [To DELEGATE.]

And so Giovanni del Virgilio urges
That Dante wear Bologna's poet's crown?

DELEGATE.

'Tis this honor that we tender him.

CAN GRANDE.

Where roosts our owl? Canst lure him back
to us?

[Addressing JESTER.]

JESTER. [Pulling back the arras.]

See poet wrapt, oblivious of the world!

[DANTE is sitting in the casement writing.

The DELEGATE and Giotto approach
him.]

DELEGATE.

Greeting to thee, great Dante Allighieri,
From thy friend Giovanni del Virgilio.

[Hands papers to DANTE. DANTE rises,
takes them, and glances at them.]

DANTE. [Coming down from the alcove.]

For the kindly purport of thy coming
I thank thee. O, Bologna's proffered crown
Is glorious triumph for a poet's heart.
But 'tis ungrateful Florence that should tend*
A laurel wreath to me, her son. Again
I thank thee, and the Bolognese who sought

* Dante's *Epistle*.

To crown an exiled and a saddened poet.
When newer kingdoms in my cantos live,*
And denizens of starry spheres appear,
Then garland me with ivy and with laurel
That grows within the walls of well-loved
Florence.

DELEGATE.

I fear those plants have never taken root.
Dante, we honor thee, whom Florence scorns.
May other cities' tribute heal the wounds
The ungrateful Tuscan town has given thee.

CAN GRANDE.

Bethink thee, Dante, twice, ere thou refuse
Bologna's crown.

DANTE.

I need no crown, save one:
Death's pall soon covers passion, pride and
joy.

In deep dug grave they sink to nothingness.
So shovel on the Lethean earth—on all
Save love, for that's entwined around our
souls

And wings our wistful spirits unto Heaven.

DELEGATE.

With hearty sorrow we must wend our way,
Bearing thy message back to fair Bologna.

* Dante's *Epistle*.

O that our noble town had given thee birth,
So thou hadst worn the crown she offers thee!

DANTE.

Though Florence caused me pain, I would not
change

My birthright; though her stones, like heated
ploughshares

Burnt flesh from off my bones, I'd love her
still.

Nature and art have crowned her queen
among

The cities of our land. The day will dawn
When all her bitterness toward me shall
vanish:

'Tis but a breath, blown by the people's
mouth,

Who suck in error with their mother's milk.
A purer air must fill their lungs ere long;
Great drafts of freedom will transfigure Flor-
ence.

Her hand outstretched, she'll clasp all Italy.
By then my winding sheet will be white dust.
But, if my spirit can commune with earth,
I'll know the tardy honors tendered me.

Go tell the kindly Bolognese my message:
I bid ye for all time, Farewell!

Farewell!

DELEGATE.

Farewell!

[DANTE turns aside.]

CAN GRANDE. [To DELEGATE.]

Dreaming o'er what he writes, our Dante
spurns

The gifts Fate offers him. But let us tend
To thee our Court's glad hospitality.

[The DELEGATE is presented to GIOVANNA
and is served with wine. CAN GRANDE
joins them as the tables are taken out and
the ladies and courtiers begin to disperse.]

CAN GRANDE. [Holding out his hand to
DANTE.]

Thou mighty man—I hate thy scathing
words,

But I do love thy wondrous lore. Forgive
My hasty speech.

DANTE.

We see with different eyes.

My heart still beats for thee, though sharp
my tongue;

But in the days to come I must live hence.

The peace of the Pineta lures me there.

My message to the world needs calmer hours
Than thy gay court affords, Can Grande.

GIOVANNA.

Forget

Thy script to-night—

ESTER.

How can he when he lives
For that alone? What did'st thou find, good
Ser,

In thy strange wanderings entering Hell?

DANTE.

A gate upon whose portals were these
words: *

Through me ye pass unto the doleful city,
Through me ye enter to eternal woe,
Through me ye meet the people damned and
lost.

'Twas Justice moved my ancient fashioner,
And Power divine created me of yore,
Wisdom supreme and the first spirit of Love
Before I was: naught did exist but what
Eternal was; and I eternal stand.

All hope abandon ye who enter here.

[*The courtiers and ladies murmur.*]

GIOVANNA.

Unless I hear gay strains to-night, no sleep
Would close my eyes, since hearing these
drear words.

* *Divina Comedia.*

Come, friends, let's to the garden, there the
moon
Will send us pleasant fancies ere we part.

[*The JESTER starts singing and dancing, as the Court, catching the refrain, passes out with CAN GRANDE and DELEGATE. A girl pelts DANTE with roses and runs away laughing. GIOTTO and FRANCESCA are urged by DANTE to leave him. Reluctantly, they go; last of all, UBERTO and BICE, who embraces her father.*]]

BICE.

Uncrowned by Florence, still thou art a king,
Thy kingdom widening over all the earth.
I hail thee such, dear father; wear thy crown!

[*She takes the wreath from her head and puts it on DANTE's. The torches are carried out: DANTE stands meditating in the moonlight.*]]

CURTAIN

ACT IV: *Scene III*

*Room in the Palace of Guido Novello 'di
Polenta at Ravenna.*

Enter Giotto, Jacopo and Pietro.

GIOTTO.

Would I could veil to-day this startling truth,
But still it stares me naked in the face.

JACOPO.

My father seems to fail through lack of spirit:
This ending of Venetian embassy
Much chafed him. Guido haply thought to
win

'Ally thereby, and check the grasping Guelphs,
Whose growing power he fears, though his
their party.

But, dreading Papal wrath, Venezia spurned
The embassy, refused to see my father.
This galled his haughty soul. In vain our
host

Flings free his favors in our midst—in vain
Uplifts Pietro and myself. Alas!
Ravenna's ruler fails to ease the pain
That gnaws at Dante's heart.

PIETRO.

Alone his poem
So wondrously completed, comforts him.
But now he mourns the loss of thirteen can-
tos:

This mars the triumph of his mighty work.

GIOTTO.

'Tis strange he fails to find what his hands
hid.

JACOPO.

The past years' storms have clouded memory.

[Enter FRANCESCA.]

GIOTTO.

Good Cesca, how doth Dante fare this morn?

FRANCESCA.

He comes with Bice from the balcony.

[Enter DANTE leaning on BICE's arm.]

GIOTTO. [Greeting him.]

Thou'rt pale, dear friend, and cold.

BICE.

Too long he lingered,
Watching the upward flight of circling birds.

GIOTTO.

These early Autumn breezes blow thee harm.

DANTE.

The fault's not in the winds—but me;
strength fails;

This golden month has no more golden mean.
Dawns grow to morns, and they to noons,
and dusks

To dawns again; while creeping centuries
Mark slowly time upon the eternal dial,
That lasts till sets the Sun of Righteousness.
As sick men preach to friends in robust health
That drafts and damps bring aches and fev-
ered beds,

Knowing they venture naught but tested
truths,

Yet see their wise words fall on heedless ears.
So I, who am bereft of home and honor,
Would others warn that earthly joys are
shadows,

But know I'd preach in vain to listless crowds,
Meeting with same success as sick men's ser-
mons.

GIOTTO.

This sick man's sermon we'll most gladly
hear;

But tell me, Dante, how to serve thee best?

DANTE.

Fling wide the casement: let the sunshine in
Until the last rays fade to sombre night.
So sets my sun; so nears my night, and then
All ends.

BICE. [Giving DANTE a cup.]

Dear father, this will give thee strength.
DANTE.

Ay, strength to meet the last of all our foes.
He never fails his tryst to keep, well knowing
In every struggle he still wins the day.
But One alone has striven to victory;
The Blessed Master conquered Death for aye.
Love pointeth to the bleeding Christ on cross,
The patient, waiting Christ who calls to us
Though our weak hearts like angry crowds
cry out:

‘O crucify Him—crucify the Good;
We want Barabbas; want our evil deeds!’
Why weeping, Cesca? Hush, our lady
listens;
I see her standing in the evening light—
Saint, halo-crowned. O Beatrice, speak!

BICE.

I’m here, dear father.

FRANCESCA.

Nay, not thee he means,
But she—the Beatrice of his youth.

DANTE.

Madonna, at thy feet I lay my love:
O, glean it to thee close, most saintly one,
Within thy bosom let it lie,

Like scented flower, a moment, next thy heart;
Or tread it low, beneath thy heel like dust.
'Tis all thy own to prize or scorn, sweet Bice.
Didst thou not pray me to shun pride? Alas!
This pride has proved thorn in my flesh
through life.

O Beatrice! silent still? Thy lips
Are smiling. Hush! At last she speaks.

[DANTE looks upward as at a vision.]

BICE. [Weeping.]

O father, father!

DANTE. [Half-rising from his chair.]
My cantos! Madonna—

I follow thee.

[Rises. BICE tries to restrain him.]

GIOTTO.

He sees a vision: stay!

[Holds BICE back. DANTE walks toward
the wall.]

DANTE. [Very slowly.]

Behind the panel—yea, thou seest all.

[He reaches the wall and touches a panel,
which opens.]

DANTE.

O, how thy love protects me, Beatrice!

[He takes the lost manuscript from the
panel.]

GIOTTO.

The missing cantos!

BICE.

A miracle—yea,
A miracle from Heaven!

DANTE. [Turning and gazing upward.]

Madonna,

Thou givest me my very light of life!

[Pause.]

Thou fadest from my vision! Beatrice!

[JACOPO and PIETRO assist DANTE to a
chair.]

BICE.

Father, rest.

DANTE.

Gone—the angels have wafted her
To Heaven again.

BICE.

Praise God, O Father, that He hath vouch-
safed

This grace to thee. O, let my arms bind thee
To earth.

DANTE.

Thou holdest but the fragile shell
Of my sad soul.

[Touching the manuscript.]

This casing of my thoughts

Reveals an inner light; take it, my children;
Bequeath it to the world when I am gone.

[Enter GUIDO NOVELLO and a priest.]

GUIDO.

We come to ask how now our Dante fares.

DANTE.

He fares now well, since loosed the silver
cords,

And broken golden bowl. Now shall the
dust

Return to dust, the spirit to our God.

GUIDO.

Our days are in His hands; we'll pray He
spare

Thy life to us for still some length of years.
Dante, I bring thee news.

DANTE.

I, too, have news.

GUIDO.

An embassy from Rome awaiteth thee.

DANTE.

An embassy from Heaven awaits my soul.
Through all my life I ever humbly strove
To mingle God with daily acts. Why shrink
The last act of my life to share with God?
Admit my friends.

GUIDO. [*Aside to PIETRO.*]

This whispering of Rome
Low in Ravenna's ears, means mischief,
Pietro.

[Enter CARDINAL, attendants and UBERTO.

DANTE rises to meet them.]

CARDINAL.

Messer Dante, the holy Church salutes thee.

DANTE.

And I, as when at Rome, salute the Church.

[UBERTO, having greeted FRANCESCA and
BICE, draws near to DANTE.]

UBERTO. [*Aside to DANTE.*]

I hear this envoy from the Pope means ill.

DANTE.

E'en a sick lion, when roused, can match a
fox.

[The CARDINAL, having greeted Giotto,
joins DANTE.]

CARDINAL.

I fear thy labors have outstripped thy
strength.

We hear thy poem on Heaven and Hell is
finished.

May the Saints grant it be not impious.

DANTE.

'Tis not the Saints, but men may deem it so.

GUIDO.

Most wondrous are the pictures Dante draws;
He minglest poetry, philosophy,
Religious thoughts and history in one theme.
I feel most honored here to house such guest.

GIOTTO.

Yea, this Court harbors now, Lord Cardinal,
Italia's most illustrious man.

CARDINAL.

God grant
His Holiness concedes this, too, good Giotto.

DANTE.

The triple crown oft menaces the laurel.

CARDINAL.

But not when grown on consecrated ground!
The Holy Father sanctions art and learning;
The city swears by her proud self these days.
We boast the gayest singers, lightest dancers
In Rome. Our poets quaff the sparkling
wine,

On every pinnacle of mirth. Without
Some jocund rhymes salute the ears, and,
mingling

With bells of mules and cries of trafficking,
And strangers swarming, add their welcome
coin.

DANTE.

Ay, welcome to the Church. I recollect
The year Pope Boniface most wisely ordered
The Jubilee; how pilgrims flocked to Rome,
And day and night they raked gold treasures
in;
These eyes have seen the priests with rakes in
hand;
And hundreds slept in streets, content to lie
Within your walls. And now, Lord Car-
dinal,
Prithee, proceed—unfold thy mission here.

CARDINAL.

I come because His Holiness, the Pope
Desires to satisfy himself thy work
Is not inimical to all the teachings
Of Mother Church. I prithee, Messer
Dante,
Commit this manuscript unto my care,
So, by perusal, I can straight refute
The slanders on it spreading through our
land.

DANTE.

Truth needs no refutation.

[*Touches the manuscript.*]

This is truth.

CARDINAL. [Leaning over and placing his hand on the manuscript.]

Then let us test it, Messer Allighieri.

DANTE. [Powerfully.]

Hold!

[Pause.]

Rome's greedy hand may rake in gold,
But not this treasure of my soul. Beware!

CARDINAL.

Thy blasphemies may damn thy poem and soul.

DANTE.

When palaces of Popes lie low in ruin
When world-famed kings are dust, and all
this power

A dream of by-gone days, this monument
Shall firmly stand as now on rock of truth.

CARDINAL.

Beware! Anathema may be its fate.

[BICE starts and cries out.]

DANTE.

Before the frightened eyes of slaves and children

Shake out thy spectre of anathema,
And flay them with the iron rod of dogma.
But free men need not cower before the Church.

They reverence piety in priest or layman.
But Catholics should bend to Christ 'fore
Rome.

CARDINAL.

The fagots in the market place hiss hot
For thee and thy pernicious work, and hell
Awaits thee joyfully, thou most accurst—

DANTE.

At last thy mask is off!

CARDINAL.

Thou heretic!

From Rome the Holy Father'll deal with
thee.

[*Exit with attendants.*]

DANTE. [*As CARDINAL leaves.*]

The Holy Father from Heaven will deal with
thee.

O Rome, is this thy mission, to create
St. Peter's chair for knaves to desecrate?
Where all the saints once crowned upon that
seat?

Dead—martyred by these vicious men who
wrest

The papal power from every hand that's
clean.

How long, how long, Jerusalem, shall sin
Usurp thy purity? O Italy,

Awake to brighter aims of broader purpose.
Then let thy mem'ry note my latest breath
Declares death hath no sting, no torment, hell
Keener than earth's injustice, since to live
Misunderstood, condemned by those we love,
Is death and hell together—Give me air!

[*Sinks back in chair.*]

How dark it grows.

BICE.

O God, have mercy on him!

DANTE. [*Rousing himself.*]

Why fear the shears that snip life's snarled
thread

When it but signifies the end of pain?

In gentle guise, come to me, Death, at last;
Shut out from strainèd lids the world's harsh
views;

Seal up the jarred ear from earth's rude
sounds;

Stay grief's grim accents on the trembling
lips;

Steal pain from touch; take tired exile home;
O thou great herald of eternal rest!

GUIDO.

His end is near.

GIOTTO.

The century's light burns low.

DANTE. [Gazing upward.]

Come closer, shades. What, do ye fly my touch?

Hath woe not purified my flesh enow?

Must my poor soul, still sighing, sit within
The adamantine prison of the flesh?

Hath it not even reached an outer door

Where through some blessed chink it spies
beyond

Its kin at rest, care-free, in sweet Elysium?

Fed on the tree of life in Paradise,

When perfect grown, must these new spirits
swing

The incense of their love and praise alone

In Heaven's domes? Shall not some holy
breath

Be wafted down from them to earth again,
Sweetening our lives and cleansing us from
sin,

And so let those above by mystic tie

Be linked to what they were in living men.

[Pause.]

DANTE. [Resuming.]

O Beatrice, such pure soul as thine

Needs lower stoop than most, to reach us
here.

Madonna, at thy feet I lay my love;

O, lift it to thy bosom, let it lie,
Like scented blossom, lightly, near thy heart.
Still silent, blessed one? Thine eyes speak
only;
Thou standest near the Church enthroned in
glory,
Beside the Rose of Heaven, the Virgin
Mother,
Who shineth, clothed in light eternally.
Even thou—even thou—art Beatrice!
Stretch out thy holy hands; help me to thee!

[*Rising.*]

O let my faltering tongue find power
So that a spark of all thy glory trail
Resplendent through all centuries to come,
Lit by the love that moves the sun and stars,
That gives me God and Florence—Bea-
trice—

[*He dies.*]

CURTAIN



'APPENDIX

"Two women's angry looks
First lit this coal of enmity betwixt
Ye twain. When Vieri at the feast, in jest,
Begged that some friendly soul should sit be-
tween

Thy lady and her neighbor at the board——"

[*Act I.*]

'At a feast, Vieri dei Cerchi, observing two ladies exchange unfriendly looks, laughingly said, "As these two dames do not agree, it will be best to put some friendly soul between them." Dona Donati instantly sprang up, pale with rage, and was leaving the table, when Vieri rose, begged her pardon, and prayed she would be seated, laying his hand upon her sleeve as he spoke. But the angry dame shook it off, proclaiming loudly that it had all been a planned insult.

Vieri, furious, replied hotly; upon which Donati drew his sword, vowing his wife was insulted. Blows followed, and the feast ended in a general fray,

“Nay, truths, proud painter; didst not make
thee great
With one round O?”

[*Act IV: Scene II.*]

Giotto di Bondone (1276-1336), founder of modern Italian art, was a shepherd boy, but made rapid progress under his master, Cimabue. His fame soon spread, and Pope Benedict sent one of his courtiers into Tuscany to see what sort of a man he was and what his works were like, for the Pope was planning to have some paintings made in St. Peter's. This courtier, on his way to see Giotto and to find out what other masters of painting and mosaic there were in Florence, spoke with many masters in Sienna, and then, having received some drawings from them, he came to Florence. And one morning going into the workshop of Giotto, who was at his labors, he showed him the mind of the Pope, and at last asked him to give him a little drawing to send to his Holiness. Giotto, who was a man of courteous manners, immediately took a sheet of paper, and with a pen dipped in red, fixing his arm firmly against his side to make a compass of it, with a turn of his hand he made a circle so perfect that it was a marvel to see it. Having done it, he turned

smiling to the courtier and said, "Here is the drawing." But he, thinking he was being laughed at, asked, "Am I to have no other drawing than this?" "This is enough and too much," replied Giotto; "send it with the others and see if it will be understood." The messenger, seeing that he could get nothing else, departed ill-pleased, not doubting that he had been made a fool of. However, sending the other drawings to the Pope with the names of those who had made them, he sent also Giotto's, relating how he had made the circle without moving his arm and without compasses, which, when the Pope and many of his courtiers understood, they saw that Giotto must surpass greatly all the other painters of his time.

[*Vasari's Lives.*.]

"When the Vale was sending to the Seven Hills
Fresh fuel from the Forest to the Altar."

[*Act IV: Scene II.*]

The Cerchi party was called the Forest party—"Parte Selvagia"—as they came from the woods of the valley of the Seine and district of Accone. Later they assumed the name of Bianchi, and Donati's followers were then called Nieri.

"Shall I, then, feed on Dante's pile of bones?"
[*Act IV: Scene II.*]

While Dante was at the Court of Can Grande, a boy who was concealed under the table, gathering the bones which, according to the custom of the time, were thrown under the table, placed them all together at the feet of the poet. On rising from the table the pile was discovered. The company seemed much amused, and Can Grande remarked that Dante must be a great eater of meat, to which he quickly retorted, alluding to the name of Cane, "Sir, you would not see so many bones even if I were a dog (*un cane*)."

[Botta's *Dante*.]





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